

PLUCK AND LUCK

STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York Post Office, November 7, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 549.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 9, 1908.

Price 5 Cents.

THE BLOCK HOUSE BOYS; OR, THE YOUNG PIONEERS OF THE GREAT LAKES.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Quick as thought, Nate Badger changed his position and placed Nettie between himself and Bert Shirley. The boy was baffled then as regarded shooting. But, clubbing the gun, he rushed at Badger. There were many French soldiers spectators of the scene.

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THE BLOCK HOUSE BOYS

OR,

The Young Pioneers of the Great Lakes

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY EVENTS.

It was a dark period in our colonial history when in the early summer of 1756 the French Canadian and Indian forces under General Montgomery captured Oswego, the American key to Lake Ontario, and a large quantity of cannon and military stores, together with the entire garrison of sixteen hundred troops. A more signal disaster could scarcely have befallen our colonies.

The American pioneers of the Great Lakes were terror-stricken, and it was feared that now, having gained a base of permanent supplies in the American territory, the French would send their murderous Indian allies to deal death and desolation, with torch, tomahawk, and scalping knife, along all our northern border, and throughout the fertile lake country.

Although for about two years the French and English colonies had been at war, the two governments had maintained the relations of peace at home until the spring of 1756. Then war was declared by Great Britain against France in due form, and the celebrated conflict began which is called in our annals "The French and Indian War."

General Abercrombie was in command of the American troops, while General Montcalm commanded the French and Indians.

Crown Point and Ticonderoga were French posts, with strong forts on Lake Champlain, and the nearest American post was the settlement of William Henry, on Lake George.

Between these frontier settlements of the hostile colonies was the great northern forest, and the hunting grounds of the savages, most of whom had been won over to the side of the enemies of the Americans by French gold.

At the date of which we are writing the Americans had constructed a strong block house or log fort at the settlement of William Henry, so that in the event of an Indian attack the settlers might have a place to shelter themselves and families and defend it against their red foes.

One moonlight night, not long after the French and Indian victory at Oswego, Legrand Shirley, the hunter of the block house at William Henry settlement, and Manatock, a friendly Mohawk Indian, left the log fort and made their way swiftly northward into the great forest.

Legrand Shirley was a stalwart American colonist of middle age, who had emigrated from England some years previously, accompanied by his wife and two little ones, named respectively Berton and Valentine.

Legrand Shirley was the son of a wealthy English gentleman, but he had come to America almost penniless, and after the death of his beloved wife, which occurred soon after his arrival in America, he seemed to lose heart to do battle with the world, and being an excellent hunter he had been content to accept the position of hunter for the block house.

There his two boys were reared, and they became brave young pioneers, skilled in all that pertained to woodcraft, excellent marksmen, splendid trailers, and learned in many of the Indian dialects, for before the French made them hostile the northern tribes used to come to the block house to trade.

Bert and Val Shirley were now aged respectively sixteen and eighteen years. Both were fine, well-grown lads, athletic of frame, with bright intelligent faces and good true hearts.

It is almost needless to say they were the pride of their father's heart, and general favorites with all the American settlers.

Far and wide, along the American border, the boys were known as "The Block House Boys," because they made their home at the log fort.

Manatock, the friendly Mohawk, was as fine a specimen of the grand Indian warrior of those early days as one can conceive of. Tall and magnificently formed, with muscles of iron; lithe as a panther, swift-footed as an antelope, cunning as a fox, and brave as a lion, he was a most valuable scout and ally of the Americans.

And he was particularly devoted to the Block House Boys and their father, who had on many occasions proven themselves to be his true friends.

On the night of which we are writing Legrand Shirley was exceedingly anxious about the safety of his two sons, and Manatock shared his solicitude fully.

The two lads had gone out hunting early in the morning, promising to return by midday. But they had not yet returned to the block house, and when the night fell, being well-nigh convinced that some calamity had befallen the boys, their father and the friendly Mohawk set out to look for them.

A few days previously they had found moccasin tracks in the woods at no great distance from the block house, and they

were not without grave apprehensions that the boys might have fallen into the hands of the hostile Indians, who were the allies of the French.

For some time the Mohawk and his white comrade followed the trail of the missing boys which they had struck in the edge of the woods, in silence.

But all at once, a distance of several miles from the block house, Manatock, who was in advance, suddenly paused, and pointing down at the trail, said in guttural tones:

"Senecas make tracks here! See, moccasin prints. Ten warriors came on white boys' trail here, and they not cross it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Shirley, "it is as we feared; the murderous Senecas are the cause of the non-return of my two sons. They followed Bert and Val's trail from this point. God grant they may not have overtaken and captured them!"

"White boys know much. Manatock taught them to blind a trail. Maybe they are safe yet. Seneca maybe cut them off so no get back to block house."

"Well, forward, Manatock! We must learn the truth, and every moment may count for the lives of my dear boys now."

"Ugh! Mohawk go on! Maybe take Senecas' scalp. The Senecas are women and cowards and they fear the Mohawk."

Manatock started forward on the trail again as he spoke and Shirley closely followed him. They went on in silence for a long time, and both were alert and constantly on the watch for an enemy.

Many miles were traversed and still the plainly defined trail told them that the Senecas had not yet overtaken the white lads.

From the latter's tracks the two trailers judged that the boys were aware that they were pursued, and that they were making all speed to distance the savages.

Finally Shirley and the Mohawk arrived at a stream of water, and there the trail of the boys disappeared, but the tracks of the Senecas were found on both sides of the water-course going upstream.

Shirley and the Indian followed the trail left by the Senecas until they finally lost it in a barren, rocky region a mile farther on.

They knew the white boys had waded upstream to blind the trail, but they could not find where they had left the water.

Presently, however, about half a mile from the stream which they had left to make a scout for the lost trail, Shirley and the Mohawk came upon the edge of a small clearing, in which stood a dilapidated log cabin, which they knew had been deserted since the northern Indians became hostile.

Just as they reached the edge of the timber, Manatock detected the tracks of the two white boys in the soft earth, with the toes pointing toward the cabin.

Shirley counted ten warriors about the cabin, beside which stood a large tree, whose spreading branches extended out over the cabin roof.

"Heavens!" said the anxious father. "It must be, Manatock, that Bert and Val have sought shelter in the deserted cabin. But if so, why do they not fire upon the Senecas? They are close enough."

"Manatock can say nothing 'bout that. Come, we crawl up like snake to help the boys, while Senecas break down cabin door."

"Yes. The odds are terribly against us, but the Senecas are armed only with bows and arrows, and we at least have the advantage of firearms. Oh, Heaven protect my boys!" replied Shirley.

Then, under cover of the grass, they began to crawl toward the cabin. Presently they saw four of the Senecas climb the tree beside the settler's deserted home.

If they could have seen the interior of the log cabin they

would have been thrilled to the heart by the discovery that the situation of the Block House Boys was even more terrible and hopeless than they supposed.

Bert and Val Shirley were sleeping soundly upon their blankets in one corner of the log cabin with their guns beside them.

As their father and Manatock had learned from the signs on their trail, they had discovered a long distance back that the hostile Indians were in pursuit of them. Then they had fled at the greatest possible speed until they had arrived at the watercourse. That stream they entered and waded north for miles. At last they left the water where their moccasins left no impression on the flinty rocks.

Climbing then into the tops of some studded hemlock trees they there concealed themselves until the Senecas came up. They heard the Senecas acknowledge that they could not find their trail, and say they would turn back and go to Fort Edward, a post some fifteen miles south of the block house.

The boys remained concealed in the treetops until the Indians had been gone for some time. Then they descended to the ground again.

They were exhausted by their long run, and knowing of the deserted cabin they resolved to go there and pass the night, and then make their way back to the block house in the morning.

Arriving at the cabin they entered it, and having secured the door by means of a stout oaken bar which they found at hand, they spread their blankets, lay down upon them, and with no further thought of danger from the Senecas soon fell asleep.

But the crafty Indians had not really left the neighborhood, though they had gone southward a short distance. They reasoned that the white boys had left the water where the flinty rocks would conceal their trail, precisely as they had done. Halting in a thicket, two scouts were sent out to make a stealthy detour beyond the rocky place in the hope that the lost trail might be found again where the ground became soft.

So it transpired that not long after the boys entered the deserted cabin and fell asleep, one of the Seneca scouts found their trail at the edge of the clearing and followed it to the cabin.

Then peering through a loophole in the wall, the redskin spy had seen the boys asleep inside. He tried the door silently, and having found it fastened, he crept noiselessly away, and rejoining his band, informed them of his discovery.

All the war party then advanced with the greatest caution, intending to take the boys by surprise or kill them while they slept.

The cabin was provided with a stone chimney, going down to a deep, wide, rudely built fireplace.

It was now the purpose of the Indians, who climbed the tree, to gain the roof of the cabin and then drop down the chimney.

The father of the imperiled boys and the friendly Mohawk saw the four Senecas lower themselves from the limbs of the tree upon the cabin roof and go to the chimney. Then they divined the purpose of the savages.

Meantime the Block House Boys slept on, unconscious of the awful danger that so nearly menaced them. The moonlight, falling through a small window not large enough for an Indian to enter by, lighted the interior of the cabin, showing the rough stone fireplace and the upturned faces of the two boys.

All at once the legs of a Seneca warrior appeared in the wide fireplace, and a hideous painted savage silently lowered himself upon the hearth. For a moment he glared at the sleeping boys, and then, as another redskin came climbing down the chimney, he drew his tomahawk, and with the wea-

raised for a terrible blow, he began to steal across the floor, straight toward the sleeping boys.

And still the Block House Boys did not waken, while nearer and nearer crept the murderous savage who meant to slay them both.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEATH OF LEGRAND SHIRLEY.

Meanwhile what measures had the father of the Block House Boys and the friendly Mohawk adopted looking to the preservation of the lads?

There was a clump of timber in the clearing not far from the cabin, and some bushes grew close to the rear wall of the structure.

Shirley and the Mohawk instantly decided what to do. The former made for the bushes against the rear cabin wall, while Manatock gained the cover of the grove.

None too soon did Shirley reach the bushes. He had just concealed himself therein, and raised his head and peered through a loophole, when he saw the first Indian who had descended by the chimney stealing upon his sleeping boys.

Quick as thought Shirley aimed his gun through the loophole at the murderous redskin and pulled the trigger. There came a loud report, and with a terrible yell the savage fell with a bullet through his heart.

The two boys sprang to their feet clutching their guns as the detonation of their father's weapon awakened them. But now the second Indian, who alighted on the hearth as the foremost one fell, darted at the lads. As he came on he hurled his hatchet at Bert, but the boy dodged the weapon and it was buried in the log wall behind him.

Then Val's gun exploded, and the second savage dropped at his feet, shot through the brain. At the same moment a volley of shots was discharged from the grove at the Senecas on the outside of the cabin.

Those shots were fired by Manatock from his flint lock and a pair of the single-barreled pistols in use at that date.

Every shot the Mohawk fired dropped a Seneca. His volley dropped three of them, and as two had been killed in the cabin, but five of the hostile war party remained alive.

They evidently thought a considerable party of enemies were at hand in the grove, and while the two who were yet on the cabin roof scrambled into the tree the other three made for cover.

Then Shirley quickly reloaded and brought down one of the Indians in the tree, while he shouted to the boys to come out. Meanwhile Manatock rushed from the grove, and shot the second Indian in the tree, while the boys unbarred the door and came outside of the cabin.

Then all of the whites, led by the friendly Mohawk, started in pursuit of the three Senecas who had fled.

But the chase was not long continued. Finding that the Senecas were leading them further and further from the block house, the whites and their Mohawk comrade turned back presently.

Mutual explanations were made, and they set out on the return march for the American settlement.

But the adventures of the night were not over yet. As they were passing a thicket some miles to the southward two shots were fired in quick succession from an ambush in the cover.

Legrand Shirley reeled back and fell into his sons' arms. They half dragged, half carried him beyond a tree. The Mohawk leaped to cover with a single bound and sent a bullet into the thicket. A moment subsequently under the moonlight two redskins were seen making off, dodging from tree to tree. Manatock would have pursued them, but he saw that Shirley was severely wounded.

The boys had placed their father on the ground, and, while Bert supported him, Val tried to stop the flow of blood from

a bullet wound in his breast, Manatock came and knelt beside his wounded friend, and examined the wound.

The Indian shook his head sadly as he saw that the injury was a fatal one.

Legrand Shirley knew that he had received his death wound. It needed not the look of heartfelt sorrow that came upon the face of the Indian to tell him there was no hope.

"My dear sons," said the dying pioneer, faintly, "I must leave you forever. I am sinking fast, but while I have strength I want to tell you something of the past."

The lads were in tears. They knew that the dread white shadow had fallen upon their beloved father. They could not speak for their emotion, but they listened while he continued:

"My father married a second time while I was a youth. The stepmother he gave me was a French woman, and she had a son by a first husband, named Volmar Kilda, whom she brought with her to my home. Volmar and I were about of an age, but we never became friends. The fierce, cruel disposition of the half French half Russian lad repelled me.

"His father was a Muscovite. My father disapproved of my marriage and at that time made a will disinheriting me. But later on he sent for me and told me he had revoked the first will and made a second one in my favor. Whether he did it or not no one knows, but I believe he did. But the first will only was found at his death, in which Volmar Kilda was named sole heir. My father died a violent death. He was found dead in the woods on his own estate, where he had gone to hunt, and he had been shot through the head. Who killed him was never positively proven, but as one Bart Blackwood, a gamekeeper, suddenly disappeared and was never heard of again, it was generally concluded he was the guilty party, and that he had fled the country. Volmar Kilda received the inheritance and converting everything into money he came to America. His sympathies were with the French, and he established himself in Quebec and built up a great fur trade with all the northern Indian tribes, establishing branches at Crown Point, and in the far north. He gained great influence with the Indians, and on that account he has been made a colonel in the French army. Kilda has for years enjoyed the fortune that is rightfully mine, and but three days since I received a mysterious communication assuring me that the last will of my father is in existence and that I am the heir. The message was brought me by a strange Cherokee Indian. It was written on birch bark and ran thus:

"Your father did make a will revoking the one that disinherited you. The last will made you the heir. I can produce that will. Seek to rescue me from the Cherokee Indians, to whom I was sold as a slave by Volmar Kilda, and I will give you your father's last will. Bart Blackwood."

"You see, the author of the message was the missing gamekeeper, who was suspected of killing my father.

"Now, my dear sons, before I breathe my last, I wish you to promise me to try to find my father's last will, and also to obtain the inheritance Kilda has so long unjustly held, if the will proves your right to it, as my direct heirs."

Shirley paused, and kneeling at his side the two boys said, in solemn broken voices:

"Father, we promise as you desire."

"That is well," he answered, faintly, and then he added: "Manatock, promise me, in the sight of the great Manito, that you will ever be a true friend to my dear boys."

The noble looking Indian drew himself erect, and raising one hand majestically he pointed at the heavens, and said, solemnly:

"The Great Spirit hears the red man's oath. He swears he will be a brother to the white boys of the Block House."

Legrand Shirley smiled contentedly, drew one long, deep

breath, and when that breath was spent, his eyes closed, and his spirit took its last long flight, as peacefully as though he had only fallen asleep.

The Indian and his sons conveyed his remains to the block house. A simple funeral followed, and Legrand Shirley was interred in the settlement burying ground. The Block House Boys were orphans, but everyone was kind to them, and Colonel Hastings, the good commander of the block house, said the lads were now the children of the post.

Nettie Hastings, the colonel's pretty daughter, who had long been Bert Shirley's girlish sweetheart, was very sorry for her boy lover in his affliction, and she consoled him and his younger brother as best she could.

But about two weeks after Legrand Shirley's death, a French halfbreed, who called himself Henri Dupere, came to the block house under a white flag, followed by four hideous Seneca Indians.

The French halfbreed lost no time in making known his business to the commander of the block house. He said he came as a messenger from Colonel Volmar Kilda to the sons of Legrand Shirley.

Thereupon the commander of the block house called in Bert and Val, and Dupere, the halfbreed, gave them a letter written to them by Volmar Kilda.

We need not reproduce the letter. Suffice it to say that the substance of the communication was that having heard of the death of the boys' father, though they had long been estranged, Kilda would like to benefit the orphaned lads. He went on to say that he would give them a good home, provide them with the best private tutors, and give them a good education, and in fact, assure their future success in life, if they were worthy. If they accepted the offer, which he made in all good will, the Block House Boys were to go with Henri Dupere, Kilda's trusted clerk, and the four "honest Indians" who accompanied him. They would act as an escort for the boys and guide them safely to the French fort at Crown Point, where Kilda would meet them, and take them to his home in Quebec.

Colonel Hastings advised the American boys to accept Kilda's offer. He thought it best for them, much as he disliked to part with them.

The boys did not give Dupere an immediate answer. They thought the matter over and discussed it. It seemed to them that the opportunity to obtain an education which both ardently craved should not be cast aside, and besides if they could be near Kilda the idea occurred to them that they might find out something more about the mystery of the will and the whereabouts of Burt Blackwood.

Finally, after considerable reflection, the boys decided to accept Kilda's offer and go with the halfbreed and the four Seneca Indians.

At the time Manatock was absent from the block house, and so the boys did not have the benefit of his advice. Some days previously General Abercrombie, of the American army, had sent word to Colonel Hastings to dispatch a trusty, friendly Indian scout, to spy out the doings of the French and Indians at Ticonderoga, Crown Point, and other posts on the lakes. Manatock had been selected for this dangerous service, and he had left the block house the day before the messenger from Volmar Kilda arrived there.

Bert told Dupere that he and his brother would go with him to Crown Point. The French halfbreed seemed very much pleased. Perhaps Bert might have felt some uneasiness if he had observed the four Seneca Indians closely while he told the halfbreed that he accepted Kilda's invitation.

The flashing eyes of the fierce Senecas seemed to acquire new brilliancy. They glanced quickly into each other's faces,

and their hands sought their scalping knives and hatchets involuntarily.

The following morning, after taking a tender farewell of Nettie Hastings, Bert joined Val and they said good-by to all their friends, who wished them "God speed," and then they set out, with Dupere and his Indians, to make the journey to Crown Point through the wilderness.

The boys carried their flint-lock guns, hunting knives, powder horns, and bullet bags. They were clothed in fringed buckskin hunting suits, and they wore Indian moccasins and squirrel caps.

Altogether they looked very picturesque and handsome. Dupere walked beside the boys and chatted pleasantly in broken English, until they were a long distance from the block house. The Indians went on ahead.

When the party was half a day's journey from the American settlement the boys fancied that Dupere's good natured manner must have been assumed. He became silent, and only replied gruffly and impatiently when the lads spoke to him.

The boys observed, too, that two of the four Indians now fell in the rear while the other two continued to march ahead.

It occurred to Bert and Val that the Senecas seemed to be covetly watching them all the time. Vague misgivings began to assail the boys before the first day's march was ended.

That evening at sunset they made a camp in a little valley, under a jutting ledge of rocks. A fire was kindled, venison was broiled, and with this and bread all made a good meal.

The boys fell asleep with their guns beside them when all the others of the party, save the Indian who was left on guard, seemed to slumber.

But Bert awoke suddenly, though he knew not what had aroused him. In a moment he heard low voices, and caught the following conversation between Dupere and one of the Indians:

"In the morning," said the halfbreed, "I will make an excuse to leave the white boys alone with you and the other braves. Then you must kill them both if you mean to keep faith with Kilda, the great fur chief, and receive his gold."

"White boys shall die! Injun kill! Want Chief Kilda's gold," replied the fierce Indian.

Bert was amazed and terrified. Upon the instant he realized that he and his brother were the victims of a treacherous, murderous plot. Instinctively he felt for his gun. It was gone; so was his hunting knife, which was in his belt when he went to sleep. He saw, too, that Val was also disarmed. The Indians had taken their weapons while they slept.

"God have pity upon us! We are entirely at the mercy of the bloodthirsty savages, who have been bribed to kill us," thought Bert, in despair.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLOCK HOUSE BOYS UNMASKED IN THE PRESENCE OF THEIR DEADLY FOE.

Bert remained perfectly motionless and pretended to be still sleeping soundly.

The conversation between Dupere and the Indian ended and they drew their blankets about them, and the lad soon concluded that they had fallen asleep.

He could discern the tall form of the Indian sentinel standing beside the smoldering camp fire, and he knew the Seneca was watchful. Bert saw, too, that the guns belonging to his brother and himself were lying between two of the Indians, where it would be impossible to reach them undetected.

Bert waited for a short time and then he awakened Val by a cautious whisper. As Val opened his eyes, Bert added in his ear, speaking scarcely louder than a breath:

"Do not show you are awake. We are in great danger."

Then, as Val listened in astonishment and terror, Bert quickly told him what he had overheard, and he added:

"We are in a terrible plight, and I see no way of escape unless the Indian on guard should fall asleep. We can only watch him and wait, praying that the opportunity to steal away, which is our only hope, may come before the dawn."

Val assented, and then the two lads remained silently watching the Indian guard, while the night wore on.

But the Seneca did not sleep, and he always kept his face turned toward the boys. The first purple glow that heralded the advent of the new day appeared on the Eastern horizon, and still the Indian guard remained at his post as wakeful and vigilant as when the night began.

Very soon it would be broad daylight, and then the French halfbreed would leave the boys alone in the hands of the murderous savages to be put to death. They shuddered with dread, despite their efforts to be calm.

Their position was such that as they glanced upward they could see the projecting edge of the ledge of rocks directly above their heads. Bert all at once felt a pebble dropped from the ledge above strike upon his shoulder. He looked up quickly and saw two objects attached to a buckskin thong being lowered from the ledge by someone entirely hidden from sight among the stunted bushes that surrounded the rocks.

Just as Bert made this last surprising discovery there came a rustling sound in the bushes on the opposite side of the camp, which caused the Indian sentinel to turn and look in that direction.

When the Seneca again glanced toward the boys, he saw nothing unusual. But meantime, the objects attached to the buckskin thong had been swiftly lowered beside them, and they had secured and secreted them in the bushes, against which they lay.

As soon as it was fairly daylight the camp was astir, and Dupere said:

"Boys, I must now leave you for a time to visit an old French trapper, whose camp is not far distant, and with whom I have important business. In the meantime, you will be safe with these honest Indians."

With this Dupere shouldered his gun and strode away. The boys had arisen and paced about a bit, to stretch their limbs. But they did not go many feet away from the bushes under the ledge, and all the time they watched the movements of the treacherous savages narrowly.

Suddenly the four Senecas drew their tomahawks, and advanced upon the boys threateningly. They sprang back beside the bushes under the ledge.

"What would the warriors do? Are they not friends?" demanded Bert, as if he had no knowledge of their terrible purpose.

"Injuns kill white boys! Take scalp! Get gold!" replied the foremost of the redskin assassins.

"Stand back, you treacherous demons!" shouted Bert, and then, like a flash, he and Val snatched up out of the bushes the objects that had been lowered to them from the ledge.

These objects were two guns, and, of course, they supposed the boys had no weapons within reach. The redskins had left their own guns, and those taken from the boys, standing against a great tree on the other side of the camp fire, intending to dispatch the boys with their hatchets. At once they started for their firearms.

But the Block House Boys knew their lives depended upon prompt and decisive action, and they instantly discharged their guns. Two of the murderous Senecas fell dead under their bullets. At almost the same moment a gun was discharged from the top of the ledge, and another Seneca dropped, killed instantly. But the boys' weapons were now empty,

and they had no hunting knives. The remaining Seneca, who was a giant savage, secured his gun, and aimed it at Bert. But just as he was about to press the trigger, a pistol shot was fired from the ledge. The ball struck the fingers of the savage, and spoiled his aim. The bullet from his gun sang harmlessly by Bert's head, and with a yell of rage and pain the huge Seneca dashed into an adjacent thicket, and fled at full speed.

Then with a tremendous leap Manatock, the white lad's Mohawk friend, bounded from the ledge, and alighted beside the Block House Boys.

He it was who had lowered the guns to them, and he quickly explained:

"Manatock on way to Crown Point. Meet big band French and Senecas, turn back. Then strike trail of white boys and Senecas, know tracks of white boys, follow trail, come to camp, hear halfbreed and Senecas talk, see them steal boys' guns and knives. Then go on ledge to try save white boys. Manatock great warrior. Ugh!"

While he was speaking, he began to scalp the dead Senecas. The boys expressed their gratitude, and told how they came to be with the Senecas.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Manatock, "me no let white boys go to Kilda, the French fur chief, if had been at fort. Kilda snake. Now we go quick to cave of old Seneca medicine woman, who friend of Manatock, who once save her life. Wood full of Senecas and French on warpath. We make Senecas of ourselves, so fool bad Injuns and git back to block house."

The friendly Mohawk signaled the boys to follow him and set out for the cave he had mentioned at once.

Keeping close behind him the boys hastened from the camp where they had been in such great peril.

They had gone for some distance when they discovered three Senecas, neither of whom, however, was the one who had fled from the camp under the ledge, following them, and presently a running fight commenced, during which Manatock and the white boys, one after another, succeeded in shooting down all three of the Senecas. The last one was shot very near the cave of the old medicine woman.

As Manatock stood over this the last of the three foes who had just been upon their trail, he said:

"Ugh! Manatock do good job; This no Injun. This Red Wolf. See blood, where bullet go through head at temple. Red Wolf kill no more white women and children."

To all outward seeming the dead man was a hideous Seneca warrior. The Block House Boys were astonished when they heard Manatock say he was no Indian. They always heard that Red Wolf was the most blood-thirsty of the Seneca chiefs.

"What do you mean, Manatock? Surely Red Wolf is not a white man?" said Bert.

"Ugh! Manatock think yes. He believes Red Wolf white man. But worse than bad Injun—a renegade. But hark! Me hear footsteps. Come quick to cave," replied Manatock.

Then he and the boys went swiftly on, and soon entered a cave in a range of hills, whose entrance was so well concealed that one unacquainted with the secret of its location would not have easily found it. An old Seneca squaw, called "Wyona, the medicine woman," welcomed Manatock, and at his request, she provided him with one Seneca warrior's and two boys' costumes, which belonged to her brother and two young sons about the ages of the Block House Boys, who were now absent on the warpath.

Manatock and the white boys quickly disguised themselves as Senecas. The Mohawk painted the lads' faces, and when he finally said they were ready to go the Block House Boys the cave. Red Wolf, the seeming redskin, whom Manatock was seemingly a splendid looking Seneca warrior.

But meantime a startling occurrence transpired outside of

the cave. Red Wolf, the seeming redskin, whom Manatock and the boys had left for dead, arose to his feet. The bullet that seemed to have crashed through his brain had only grazed his skull, rendering him unconscious. He quickly took the trail of the Mohawk and the boys again, and gaining the mouth of the cave he peered within and saw Manatock and the white boys disguising themselves.

Then silently as a shadow, and with a look of savage satisfaction upon his painted face, he glided away.

Presently Manatock and the two Block House Boys emerged from the cave and took their way southward.

An hour or so later they came suddenly upon a band of a score of French and Indian scouts. They were discovered before they could retreat, and so, relying on their disguises, they held their ground. The French and Indians surrounded them. Manatock did the talking, and in answer to the questions of the French leader claimed that he and his comrades belonged to the southern branch of the Seneca tribe, that they had recently come from the neighborhood of the American settlements on Lake George, and that they meant to join the French against the English.

The enemy seemed completely deceived, and the French officer invited Manatock and the boys to accompany him to Crown Point, saying that the French commander would like to question them about the condition of the American forts on Lake George. Manatock could not do otherwise than consent, and so he and the white boys marched away with the French and Senecas. No opportunity to desert them came on the march to the French post, and at the end of the journey they found themselves at Crown Point.

Then they were conducted to a large cabin near the fort, in which the commander of the post had his headquarters.

Entering the cabin behind the French officer who had brought them to the post, they saw a stern, dark-faced man in French uniform seated at a camp table.

The French officer saluted the man at the table, and indicating Manatock and the boys, said:

"Colonel Kilda, these Senecas are from the south. I thought you would like to question them."

"Ah, so I would, so I would," replied the other, in a harsh voice.

The Block House Boys knew then that they were face to face with the man who had wronged their father and plotted their own doom.

Colonel Kilda questioned Manatock at some length, and the crafty Mohawk's replies were satisfactory, and tended to carry out his deception.

But all at once an Indian hastily entered the cabin, and Manatock and the two boys at once recognized him as the one Seneca of Dupere's band who had escaped them.

"Ha! So you have returned, Kanawah? Have you and your comrades earned my gold?" exclaimed Colonel Kilda, addressing the Seneca.

"Yes, Injuns killed white boys! Um dead in great woods! Here scalps!" replied the redskin, showing two white persons' fresh scalps in his belt. "Now Injun come for the gold," he added.

Manatock and the boys had stepped back against the side wall, and the Seneca stood before Kilda in front of the table. "You shall have the gold, chief," replied the arch villain, and taking a bag of money from his pocket he proceeded to count out a quantity of gold pieces upon the table.

"There is the amount," added Kilda, placing the last coin on the table, while the white boys looked at their foe and the blood money, almost breathless with excitement.

The Seneca was about to reach for the gold when, all at once, Red Wolf, the mysterious, whom Manatock and the boys

had left for dead, burst into the cabin, and hurling the Seneca aside, he shouted:

"Do not pay that Indian the gold!"

"Why?" demanded Kilda, starting to his feet.

"Because he has not earned it. The white boys live and there they stand!" thundered Red Wolf, pointing at the shrinking forms of the Block House Boys.

CHAPTER IV.

A THRILLING ESCAPE.

"Yes, the white boys live, and there they stand," repeated Red Wolf, fiercely.

It was a moment of the most intense and thrilling peril for the Block House Boys. There they were, in the midst of the camp of the French and Indians, and in the very presence of the man who sought their lives.

Kilda sprang to his feet, as the startling revelation of the disguised lads' identity fell from the lips of Red Wolf.

Kenewah, the lying redskin who falsely claimed the blood money which Kilda had agreed to pay for the killing of the boys, wheeled toward them.

The climax of the startling drama was reached.

The most desperate crisis had overtaken the white lads and Manatock, their devoted Mohawk friend.

One single shout, uttered by either of the three enemies of the boys and their red ally, would suffice to bring a throng of foes upon the scene.

The friendly Indian acted with unsurpassed quickness, for he knew what must be done was to be accomplished instantly, if at all.

Quick as thought Manatock's uplifted tomahawk cleft the air as Kenewah wheeled toward the boys, and the weapon crashed through the skull of the treacherous Seneca.

With a single outcry the stricken savage fell at the feet of the white lads.

Then the Mohawk's hatchet whizzed through space as he hurled it at Red Wolf. The latter dodged, but his movement did not enable him to entirely evade the weapon. It struck him with the flat of the blade on the side of the head and he went down, stricken, senseless, but not seriously injured.

Bert Shirley, meanwhile, nobly seconded the efforts of his Mohawk friend.

Just as Volmar Kilda recovered his presence of mind to some degree, and was about to shout for assistance, Bert leveled his gun at him and cried sternly:

"Not a word! Not a sound, or you are a dead man!"

Volmar Kilda turned white in his alarm and rage, but he knew that the youth who menaced him was in deadly earnest, and he dared not utter an alarm.

One glance at the Seneca he had first struck down with his tomahawk told Manatock that the painted assassin was stone dead.

"Ugh! One Seneca gone! Other sleep some time. Injun bind and gag white man. Then boys go. Wah!" said Manatock.

"Make haste! Make haste! At any moment someone may come!" cried Bert.

"Ugh!" grunted Manatock. "Injun be heap quick."

Then he forced Kilda down, and producing some stout thongs of buckskin which he chanced to have with him, he bound Kilda and also gagged him, using a knotted handkerchief belonging to one of the boys.

As soon as Kilda was properly secured the Mohawk led the way from the lodge.

They sauntered carelessly along, fearing to move with speed lest the suspicions of the Indians and Frenchmen who were moving about all through the settlement might be aroused.

The boys' hearts beat fast. Detection now meant death for

them, and they shuddered as they thought that someone might enter Kilda's lodge and discover what they had done before they could reach the forest.

Bert and Val frequently glanced backward in the direction of the lodge which they had just left. The Mohawk, too, kept glancing that way.

"If anyone goes into Kilda's quarters before we are clear of the settlement, we must run for the woods," said Bert.

"White boy say right," replied the Mohawk.

They kept on, and at last they were clear of the village, and still they had not seen anyone enter Kilda's lodge.

The boys began to breathe easier, as the prospects of escape became more assured, and presently they were at the edge of the great forest that lay between Crown Point and the American settlement of William Henry.

Entering the woods, they darted forward in a southerly course at full speed.

But, all at once, the Mohawk, who was in the lead, held up his hand warningly as he halted, and then sank noiselessly upon the earth.

The boys instantly paused, and they saw Manatock place his ear to the ground and listen for a brief space.

"Two white men come," announced the Indian. "Manatock hear them. He know um white man, 'cause make too much noise for Injun."

The astute and cunning Mohawk led the boys into a thicket, and they had scarcely concealed themselves when two white men, in the uniforms of French officers, came in view, advancing in the direction of the settlement from which our fugitives had just fled.

The two French officers were conversing earnestly, and the concealed Block House Boys and their Indian comrade overheard all they said.

One of the Frenchmen had got a pebble in his shoe, and while he seated himself on a log, near the thicket in which the listeners were concealed, to remove the annoyance, he and his companion continued to talk.

"Yes, our forces are promptly assembled at Crown Point," said one of the Frenchmen.

"There is some decisive movement against the Americans on foot, then," replied the other.

"Yes, I am in Colonel Kilda's confidence, and I do not mind telling you that he is only waiting now for the arrival of our General Montcalm before marching south."

"What is the objective plan—what American settlement is to be attacked?"

"William Henry. Kilda means to capture the block house there and so open the southern portion of Lake George to the French."

"A surprise is intended?"

"Yes. Consequently the secrecy which has been observed as to the destination of the exposition now organizing at Crown Point."

"Do you think the campaign will be successful?"

"Yes. There is an excellent plot on foot to betray the block house at William Henry into our hands."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"Nate Badger, the English renegade, means to open the block house doors for us at the proper time."

At this point in their conversation the two French officers moved on.

As soon as they were out of sight the white lads and the Indian emerged from their concealment.

They were greatly agitated and alarmed by the disclosures the Frenchmen had unwittingly made to them.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bert. "This is vitally important news. We must make all haste to reach the block house, and warn Colonel Hastings."

"Yes," rejoined Val. "Oh, it would be terrible indeed if the block house was captured through the treachery of Nate Badger. Then Nettle Hastings would fall into Badger's power."

Bert shuddered as he said:

"Heaven keep dear Nettle from such a terrible fate."

"Ugh! Some day Manatock take um Nate Badger's scalp," uttered the Mohawk fiercely.

While this exchange of remarks occurred they were proceeding rapidly.

They all felt that Nate Badger would use all his cunning against them and their friends, and it was little wonder that their apprehensions were intense, for Badger was a vindictive scoundrel, who had been driven in disgrace from the settlement of the Americans by Colonel Hastings' command.

Badger has been a thief, and he had dared attempt the abduction of Nettle Hastings.

The Block House Boys were well aware that Nate Badger had sworn vengeance upon Colonel Hastings and all the American settlers, and they knew, too, that he had vowed to yet carry off Nettle, declaring she should become his wife.

Swiftly and silently, while Manatock led the way, ever alert and watchful, the boys pressed onward, and meanwhile, determined pursuers, who possessed all the skill of bloodhounds in following a track, were on their trail.

Some time after the fugitives left the settlement of Crown Point a French officer discovered the situation in Colonel Kilda's lodge. He was promptly released, and Red Wolf restored to consciousness.

Kilda's rage may be imagined when he found that the white boys and their Indian comrade were already out of the settlement.

But he swore they should be recaptured, and selecting a score of Indians noted as runners in their tribe, he placed Red Wolf in command of them, and sent them after the Block House Boys.

Kilda gave the bloodthirsty Red Wolf the following final instructions:

"Run down the Mohawk and the white boys if you have to track them to the very doors and bring them back to me. This time I will trust no one save myself to dispose of the young rascals. When you have taken them, if you can trust your warriors to conduct them here, you had better press on to William Henry to carry out the dangerous mission you have undertaken."

Red Wolf and his braves at once set out in pursuit of the Block House Boys. They found the boys' trail and the red-skin runners darted on and on, never once at fault.

And later the fugitives met with an adventure that retarded their flight.

Suddenly Manatock heard a twig snap, as he was leading the boys through a dense portion of the woods. The succeeding moment he saw an Indian dodge from behind one tree to another. Manatock sprang behind a tree. The boys did the same. But they immediately discovered that they were surrounded by Senecas.

CHAPTER V.

DOOMED TO THE STAKE.

Of course Manatock and the two white boys yet wore the disguises of Seneca Indians, in which they had appeared before Colonel Kilda at Crown Point.

Though the movements of the Senecas, who had stealthily surrounded them, seemed to indicate that the savages had for some reason hesitated about receiving them for what they seemed, still, as this band was not from Crown Point, and had not been before encountered, the only plan to escape them seemed to be to boldly play the part of Senecas, and rely on thus deceiving the hostiles.

"Ugh!" whispered Manatock; "we fool Senecas, make 'um think we of their tribe in the south."

Then he held up his hands in token of friendship, and boldly stepped from behind the tree, saying in the Seneca tongue:

"How, brothers, how?"

The white boys imitated Manatock.

The Senecas thronged from the trees that sheltered them and greeted Manatock and the lads in a most friendly way.

"Whence come our brothers?" asked the chief of the hostile band.

"From the south," replied Manatock.

"So Big Thunder said to his braves."

"And why did our brothers steal upon us as though we were enemies?" asked Manatock.

"Because you were strangers, and we have heard that some of the southern Senecas are friendly to the Americans," answered Big Thunder.

"That is true. But we are on the side of the French men. We come now from Crown Point. We go to carry a message to the southern Senecas from the great French father, Mont-calm."

"Then you shall go on your way in peace."

"That is well, brother, for our mission bids us make haste."

"The forest is free to you."

"Come then, my sons, and I will go," said Manatock.

Then waving his hand to the hostiles in the Seneca signal of friendship, he calmly led the boys onward again.

The ordeal had been a trying one for the lads.

They could but admire the stoical calmness and cunning which Manatock had manifested during the interview with Big Thunder, however.

But they had not proceeded far when the entire band of Senecas they had just left came rushing after them.

"Ugh, what now?" said Manatock, looking troubled.

The boys shuddered with the fear that they were about to be unmasked. But they could not for their lives divine how a discovery, looking to such a result, could have been made since they parted with the hostiles.

"Something wrong," said Manatock, grasping his gun firmly as he saw the expression upon the fierce, hideously painted faces of the Senecas as they surged toward him and the boys.

In a moment the brave Mohawk and the boys were surrounded by the hostiles. The band numbered thirty odd, and in any event Manatock knew that resistance was now out of the question as far as saving the boys went.

"The warrior has spoken with a crooked tongue!" cried Big Thunder, as he confronted Manatock in the centre of the circle his warriors had formed about the Mohawk and the boys.

"No; my brother is wrong. Pawhattan speaks with a straight tongue," replied Manatock, stoutly.

A feeling of intense alarm had, naturally enough, now seized upon the lads. They saw the glances of the blood-thirsty savages fixed upon them in a menacing manner, and they were almost sure they were found out.

It was a period of suspense calculated to try the nerves and test the courage of the bravest, while Big Thunder continued:

"And does the warrior say the young braves are his sons?"

The savage chief pointed at Bert and Val with his murderous looking scalping knife as he spoke.

"Yes," replied Manatock, calmly and promptly.

"Ha! The warrior is a snake and a liar," cried Big Thunder.

Manatock's brow grew dark, and the veins in his throat and neck swelled.

"Pawhattan would make Big Thunder eat his words if he had not his braves to protect him," hissed the Mohawk.

"See. Look at the trail of the lads. Ha! The footprints tell the truth. The toes of all redmen turn in. Those boys

are whites, for their tracks show their toes turn out!" yelled Big Thunder.

The succeeding moment the hostile Senecas closed in upon Manatock and the Block House Boys, uttering fierce yells and brandishing their weapons.

The boys were quickly overpowered.

But the Mohawk proved himself a forest hero of the grandest type. With one terrific blow from the butt of his gun he knocked down Big Thunder.

Then uttering the wild, thrilling yell of the Mohawks, he shot down another Seneca, and with his tomahawk in one hand and his long, keen-bladed scalping knife in the other, he rushed at the wall of red foemen that hemmed him in.

Manatock's onset was resistless. One blow from his terrible tomahawk split the skull of a huge warrior who came in his way to the chin. Another of the Senecas went down under a blow from the Mohawk's knife that split his heart in twain.

And then Manatock was out of the circle of death that his foes had drawn about him.

The Indian paused not an instant then, but he bounded away like the wind.

The Senecas, to the number of a dozen, darted after Manatock, while those who remained behind, having disarmed the boys, tore off their Indian head-dresses and removed the paint from their faces.

Then, when the white boys stood unmasked, the savages danced and howled about them exultantly.

Some of the red demons were in favor of slaying the boys on the spot.

But Big Thunder said:

"The white boys shall be burnt at the stake. The Americans shot the chief's son last summer in the battle on the lake. Big Thunder will have his revenge."

Then the boys were bound to separate trees and the savages collected dry brush and heaped it about them.

When all was ready for the fire of death Big Thunder struck a flint, a spark fell among the dry punk he had prepared beside the brush heap that surrounded Bert, and in a moment the flames broke out.

Then the fuel that had been placed about Val was fired in the same manner.

The boys gave up all hope.

"Farewell, Val, and may God have mercy on us both!" said Bert as the smoke and flame began to envelop him.

"Good-by, brother; good-by!" responded Val falteringly.

As the flames arose higher and higher the savages danced around the fire of death brandishing their weapons and yelling like demons.

The warriors who had gone in pursuit of Manatock returned and reported that they could not find him, that he had covered his trail at some distance.

But at that very moment the white boys' noble Mohawk ally was near. He had doubled on his pursuers, after blinding his trail by climbing a tree, and then swinging himself from limb to limb along a line of forest monarchs, whose long branches almost interlaced.

Crouching in an adjacent thicket Manatock watched the terrible scene of the doom of the Black House Boys.

The Mohawk's heart was almost bursting with grief and impotent fury at the sight, and the thought that he could not save the lads he loved so well.

"The great Manito knows the Mohawk's will is good to keep his pledge to white boys' father and protect them. But Injun can't do it. Seneca dogs too many!" said the brave Indian, mentally.

And momentarily the red flames about the two white lads mounted higher and higher. The red demons pranced madly, and their yells became more exultant and terrible.

The boys began to suffer. The heat scorched their faces and the smoke half stifled them. In a moment the flames would reach their limbs. Still they made no outcry, nor did they plead for mercy, well knowing any such appeal would only be derided.

Manatock put his hands to his eyes.

He did not want to witness the awful torture and horrible death of the boys which it seemed must soon come.

But all at once a chorus of yells rang out from the northward, and through the woods, coming from the direction of Crown Point, Manatock saw a considerable band of Senecas.

The on-rushing band quickly reached the war party who had doomed the Block House Boys.

CHAPTER VI.

A WHITE MAN UNDER WAR PAINT AND FEATHERS.

The new arrivals were Red Wolf and the Seneca runners sent by Colonel Kilda to capture and return the Block House Boys to Crown Point.

"Those white lads escaped from the great fur chief, Kilda. He wants them back alive!" shouted Red Wolf.

He knew Big Thunder was a faithful adherent of Kilda and the French.

As he spoke Red Wolf rushed to the brush heap about Val and began kicking it away.

"If the great chief, who gives the warriors powder and fire-water, sends for the boy captives, he must have them," assented Big Thunder.

Then he threw the brush that was burning about Bert away, employing a pole for the purpose.

After that the flames were quickly extinguished.

Manatock in the thicket looked the picture of joy. He rejoiced deeply, and his simple, untutored mind was inclined to regard that timely arrival of Red Wolf and his band as an interposition of the Great Spirit in the white boys' behalf.

Almost fainting from the nervous reaction upon being snatched at the last moment from what had seemed certain doom, the two white lads were released from the trees to which they had been bound.

The boys were not freed from their bonds, however; their hands were yet secured behind their backs, and the redskins surrounded them and watched them closely.

Red Wolf's party very soon set out to conduct the lads back to Crown Point. They were marched along between their captors, half of whom went ahead of them, while the others followed.

Night came on and Red Wolf's party went into camp in an open glade in the woods. Four warriors, noted as hunters, were sent out after game. The rest of the band remained in the camp to guard the white boys.

Presently Red Wolf approached a tall sub-chief of the band who stood near the white boy captives, and said:

"I must leave you now to go to the block house at William Henry. I trust you, Tall Deer, to take the boys in safety to the fur chief."

"Tall Deer will do all his white brother asks," responded the Indian.

"Have you forgotten that I want to keep it a secret that I am a white man? Never call me your white brother again. To you and all men I am for the present an Indian," replied Red Wolf, dropping his voice and speaking firmly.

At the same time he glanced in the direction of the boy captives, to see if they had overheard.

But they were not looking that way, and seemed to be wrapped up in themselves—conversing earnestly.

A moment later Red Wolf left the camp.

Bert and Val had heard all.

"Manatock was right in his suspicions. By his own confession Red Wolf is a white man," said Val.

"Yes, but who is he? Oh, Val, I've a terrible suspicion. I believe that disguised renegade is none other than Nate Badger."

"Ah, I almost know you are right. Just now his voice sounded differently to me than it ever did before. He spoke in his natural tones now, I presume, and they were familiar. Yes, his voice was like that of the desperate villain, Nate Badger," Val said excitedly.

The boys conversed farther about the startling discovery they believed they had made.

Some time elapsed. But scarcely an hour had gone by when a Frenchman, clad in half Indian costume, and carrying a small keg strapped on his back, came into camp. The Indians greeted him with cries of delight, exclaiming:

"Le Pere, the fire-water trader!"

The Frenchman was well known and liked by the Indians, and he was soon dealing out whisky from his keg in a tin cup to the redskins, receiving in payment French gold, which but a week before the crafty Montcalm had caused to be distributed among the Senecas.

Very soon the entire band of savages, including Tall Deer, who was now in command, were deeply intoxicated. They yelled and danced and finally all hands began to shout for the blood of the white captives.

In their drunken madness they were reckless of the orders of Kilda, and Tall Deer was as mad and athirst for blood as his braves.

Le Pere tried to prevent it, but the drunken savages seized upon the white boys, and dragged them to a fallen tree, upon which they bound them, declaring that they meant to roast them alive.

Only one hope animated the boys now.

They hoped the four Indians who had been sent out as hunters, and were therefore sober, would return in time to save them.

It seemed that this hope was to be realized. The boys had just been bound to the tree, when the four hunters returned to the camp, laden with game.

The Indians who had partaken of the whisky were reeling and staggering about, none of them scarcely able to stand, as they gathered dry wood for a fire with which to roast the captives.

"Ha!" cried one of the Indian hunters, "the white man's fire-water has stolen away the brains of our brothers. They have forgotten that the great fur chief, Kilda, said we must bring the white boys to him alive this time."

The speaker and the three other sober Indians rushed to the log and cut the boys loose. Then they began to expostulate with Tall Deer and the drunken warriors who now thronged forward threateningly, and insisted upon the death of the boys. Meantime the sober Indian who had first spoken in the boys' behalf whispered in their ears:

"Run for the great stump yonder! Manatock will come after you."

The boys were astonished, but their hearts leaped for joy as they understood that one of the returned hunters was really the Mohawk. Instantly the boys bounded away.

The drunken Indians could not pursue them.

But the other three Senecas, including the disguised Mohawk, rushed after the boys. They reached the stump Manatock had indicated. There, concealed behind the stump, they found a loaded gun. Bert snatched up the weapon, leveled it over the stump, and shot down the foremost of his pursuers.

At the same instant Manatock shot down another.

Then he uttered the war cry of the Mohawks, and drawing his hatchet, sprang at the surviving one of the Seneca hunters.

The latter had left his gun in camp. Manatock discarded his gun. In a second the two deadly forest foemen came together, armed only with knife and hatchet.

Then an awful bloody duel ensued between the two Indians, but finally Manatock drove his knife through the heart of his antagonist. Then, with his blood-stained knife, he scalped the Seneca and waving the reeking trophy above his head and mad with the Indian fury which seems to seize them when they have tasted blood, he darted away, calling out to the boys:

"Follow Manatock, the Mohawk, and him save you!"

The boys sprang after the Indian, Val securing a Seneca's gun.

They ran swiftly southward.

Presently Manatock calmed down and explained to the boys that he had followed Red Wolf's band, and when the hunters left camp tracked them until they separated.

"Then Manatock steal on one hunter and send knife through him back! Then Mohawk put on his war-dress and join other Senecas. They are children! The Mohawk blinded their eyes so they did not know him. Manatock put the gun behind the stump. It belonged to the dead Seneca hunter," concluded the Mohawk.

The boys hoped their perils in getting back to the block house were now all past. They thought they could obtain so great a start that when the drunken Senecas sobered up it would be impossible for them to overtake them.

But fate was against them.

Some hours later the Mohawk announced that they were pursued. He said, too, that it could not be by Tall Deer's warriors. The boys and the Mohawk now ran at full speed. But the pursuers gained.

Finally the boys could no longer keep pace with the tireless Mohawk.

He slackened his speed, and a moment later, through the trees, he saw a large band of hostiles on his trail, and presently he knew it was Big Thunder's party. A few moments later the fugitives burst into a clearing. In the centre of the "open" was a partially built log cabin. The logs were laid up about four feet high on all sides.

The enemy was very close now, and their savage yells rang in the fugitives' ears. They reached the log pen and leaped into it.

"Here we fight till die!" gritted the Mohawk.

Then he and the boys leveled their guns over the logs, behind which they were crouched, and fired at the enemy. Three Senecas were hit. They leaped into the air and fell uttering their wild death yells. Then from all sides, yelling, leaping, brandishing their weapons, charged the redskins like a legion of demons.

CHAPTER VII.

A MAN WITH A SECRET.

At the block house, some little time subsequently to the departure of the two boys with Volmar Kilda's messengers, there was some excitement.

A sentinel who was at his post on the parapet of the log fortress discovered a strange looking man prowling along the edge of the woods in the distance.

Suspecting the man might be a spy in the service of the French, sent to inspect the log fort and the American settlement around it, the sentinel gave the alarm.

Colonel Hastings thereupon instructed two old pioneers who were skilled scouts to creep out of the settlement and try to capture the unknown.

The scouts were just about leaving the block house when the stranger was seen boldly advancing waving his blanket in the Indian fashion as a signal that he came as a friend.

Colonel Hastings then revoked the order to the two scouts and the stranger was permitted to advance unmolested.

Every loophole of the stockade was crowded with eager watchers observing the stranger as he approached, and he was soon seen to be a startling looking being.

He was clad from head to foot in buckskin garments of Indian make and heavily armed. He moved like a man in the full vigor of the prime of life, and yet his hair, which fell in heavy masses upon his broad shoulders, was as white as the driven snow. His face was one terrible mass of bluish scars—evidently powder marks—which with his white hair gave him a remarkable and frightful appearance.

Arriving at the door of the block house the stranger said:

"I come in peace. I am a friend, and I seek one Legrand Shirley."

"Admit the stranger," commanded Colonel Hastings, and in obedience to his order the door of the stockade was promptly thrown open.

The stranger entered, and while he became the centre of all glances Colonel Hastings met him within the door.

"Who are you and why do you seek Legrand Shirley?" demanded the commander of the fortress.

The dialect of the stranger had already proclaimed to all within the sound of his voice that he was not a Frenchman, and Colonel Hastings was inclined to think his profession of friendship might be made in good faith.

"I am one who is well known to Legrand Shirley. Let him come forward and he will vouch for it that I have no love for the French. When I have conversed privately with Shirley my name and business may perhaps be made known. First, however, I must see Legrand Shirley alone," replied the stranger.

Colonel Hastings was not a little surprised and mystified by this rejoinder on the part of the unknown. But his manner conveyed an assurance of sincerity, and the commander replied:

"Legrand Shirley is dead. He was recently slain by the hostile Indians!"

"Legrand Shirley killed by the Indians! Then by heavens I know who instigated his murder!" exclaimed the stranger, exhibiting intense agitation.

And he added:

"Have I come too late? But stay. I think Legrand Shirley had two sons. Oh, do not tell me they have shared their father's fate."

"No," answered Colonel Hastings, quickly. "The boys are living."

"Then I must see them instead of their father!"

"That is impossible, sir."

"How is that? Are the boys not here?"

"No. They left the block house but a short time since."

"Where have they gone?" demanded the stranger, with increasing agitation.

"To their father's brother by marriage. Volmar Kilda sent for the boys, offering them a good home, and they went with his Indian messengers!"

"My God, the boys have gone to their death!" exclaimed the stranger.

"What mean you?" cried Colonel Hastings catching the infection of agitation so marked in the manner of the other.

"Let me speak with you privately," said the stranger meaningly.

Colonel Hastings hastened to lead him into his private quarters, and when they were alone the stranger said in thrilling tones:

"I hold a secret of the past which I came to reveal to Legrand Shirley. My secret enables me to say that beyond all doubt Kilda seeks the lives of the Shirley boys. I will tell

my secret only to them. Give me all the information you can as to the party with whom the boys left the block house, and regarding their destination."

"One Frenchman named Henri Dupere, with a small party of Senecas, conducted the lads away. They said Kilda would meet them at Crown Point," replied Colonel Hastings.

"Then I must away. I'll save the boys if I can, and reveal to them the great secret, the possession of which has cost me very dear," cried the stranger.

Then grasping his gun he rushed from the presence of the commander.

"Let him go!" shouted Colonel Hastings to the guard at the gate of the stockade, for he felt that the lives of the boys now depended upon the stranger.

The latter darted out of the blockhouse without another word and dashed away to the forest. Entering the wilderness he took a course directly for the French post, which he now supposed to be the destination of the sons of Legrand Shirley.

Traveling swiftly, dodging with rare skill several bands of of hostile savages whom he encountered, but meeting with several escapes on the way, the stranger at last arrived in sight of Crown Point.

The boys had already fled from the post with their Mohawk friend, as narrated in the preceding chapters. Indeed, they had been gone from Crown Point now for some time.

Halting at the edge of the clearing in which Crown Point settlement and fort was situated, the stranger suddenly became aware that four men were approaching.

He immediately concealed himself behind a log, and presently the four men he had discovered became seated on the very log behind which he lay hidden in the dense bushes. The four men were Frenchmen, and they were conversing about the escape of the Block House Boys, whom Kilda had now proclaimed to be spies sent by the Americans.

From the conversation of the four men the stranger quickly learned that the boys he sought were now fugitives in the forest pursued by savages.

He crept away undiscovered and at once set out to seek for the trail of the Block House Boys and the Mohawk.

In his search for the trail of the white lads and their Indian friend, the stranger displayed the greatest skill and acumen as a woodsman.

His knowledge in this branch of frontier craft served him well, and he finally found the boys' trail, locating it near where they had entered the forest, at a point where the soft earth had taken an impression of their moccasins. The small size of the imprints made the stranger decide that he had made no error.

But since the flight of the Block House Boys, Colonel Kilda, to give the villain the title the French had bestowed, had caused a line of Indian sentinels to be formed about the settlement and camp, and he had issued orders to the guards to allow no one to pass unless they had the password which he had promulgated.

All at once the stranger coming around the corner of a considerable thicket found himself face to face with a tall Seneca warrior. The Indian was one of Kilda's sentinels standing guard. The Seneca raised his gun, but at the same moment the stranger hurled his hatchet at the redskin. The weapon struck the stock of the gun, and it fell from the Seneca's hold without being discharged.

The succeeding moment the stranger and the Indian sentinel were engaged in a terrible struggle, for the former did not dare discharge his gun at his foe, lest the report of the weapon should alarm his friends.

The two men were both very powerful, and pretty evenly matched in point of strength. Their battle was a conflict of

gladiators, thrilling, terrible. Each tried to be the first to draw a knife, as they struggled desperately.

For a brief space the issue of the combat remained in doubt. But at last the strange white man succeeded in drawing his knife, and almost immediately he drove it to the hilt in the heart of the savage. But at precisely the moment that the white man obtained possession of his knife, the Indian also snatched his own weapon from his girdle, and gave the other a slashing blow on the shoulder which caused the blood to stream down his left arm. The single blow of the white man's knife had slain the Indian, and the stranger gained his feet, but only to reel and fall beside his dead foe in a faint caused by loss of blood and over-exertion.

At that moment Volmar Kilda and Henri Dupere were approaching. Presently they discovered the dead Indian and the white man. They thought they detected signs of life in the white man.

Kilda and his companion were astonished at the sight of the stranger. The former tore open the white man's shirt to feel if his heart yet beat. On his breast Kilda beheld a blood-red star. The arch villain started back with a cry of alarm, and he exclaimed:

"That man is Bart Blackwood—he whom I sold to the Cherokees!"

"Mon Dieu! If he recovers to communicate with the sons of Legrand Shirley, the Block House Boys, you are ruined!"

Volmar Kilda drew his hunting-knife.

But at the same instant the seemingly insensible man gained his feet with a bound.

"Duped! Deceived! He lives!" cried Dupere.

Volmar Kilda uttered a fierce cry and sprang at the "scar-face." But the latter felled him with a blow from the stock of his gun, which he suddenly caught up. Dupere brought his gun to his shoulder.

Before he could fire, however, the stranger darted behind a tree, and then fled through a thicket. As he went he shouted:

"Justice shall yet be done! Beware of my vengeance, Volmar Kilda!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHASE ON LAKE GEORGE.

The war party of hostile Senecas, led by Big Thunder, were momentarily checked in their fierce charge upon the half-built log cabin in which the Block House Boys and Manatock, the friendly Mohawk, had sheltered themselves. But the respite thus gained by the young pioneers and their Indian ally was but brief.

Again the Senecas came on, yelling with renewed fury.

The lads had quickly reloaded their flintlocks during the halt of the Senecas, and Manatock had also charged his unerring weapon once more. The Mohawk singled out the foremost of the Senecas, and dropped the red demon in his tracks as he was in the act of discharging a shot at the log breastworks.

Val and Bart reserved their fire for a moment. Then they, too, discharged their weapons, but with an interval of a moment between their shots.

The Mohawk, meantime, reloaded his gun with miraculous quickness, and then fired again.

The Senecas, seeing four of their foremost warriors fall, hesitated for an instant, and then fell back until they were out of range of the log fortress.

As the Senecas fell back, the boys and their Mohawk comrade reloaded their smoking weapons.

Manatock looked troubled, and the boys knew that the brave Indian feared the worst.

They saw the Senecas deploy and station themselves so as to completely surround the half-built cabin at a safe distance.

"Ugh!" grunted Manatock. "Senecas mean we no creep

away in darkness. They are foxes, but we must try fool 'em by'm by."

An occasional shot came from the Senecas as the moments of suspense for the besieged elapsed, and the night drew on, while the moon sank lower and lower toward the distant horizon. Finally darkness fell.

"Now we get start before Senecas come," said the Mohawk, as soon as darkness became complete.

Then he noiselessly climbed over the log wall.

The Block House Boys followed, and Manatock led the way in the direction of the adjacent timber. With the advent of the darkness storm clouds had gathered in the sky, and now the rain began to fall.

Afar the lightning occasionally sent out its lurid shafts along the horizon, and the detonation of distant thunder rumbled through the air.

Perhaps half the distance that intervened between the log barricade and the forest had been traversed by the boys and the Mohawk, when all at once the latter abruptly halted.

"What is it?" whispered Bert.

"Injun come," replied Manatock under his breath.

Then the boys caught the sound of a stealthy, cat-like tread just in advance of them. It was a thrilling moment. Discovery meant doom. One yell from the approaching Indian would bring the entire band to intercept their flight. The boys clutched their guns more firmly and Manatock changed his course. But at that instant other footsteps were heard, and it became evident that a line of Senecas were approaching.

Manatock halted. Then he passed his gun silently to Bert, and drew his scalping knife. A moment of silence followed. Then Manatock gave a tiger-like bound into the darkness.

The boys heard a series of faint sounds, and a heavy body fell upon the ground. The succeeding moments Manatock was with them again, and he panted heavily as he uttered the single word "Forward!"

The boys knew he had silently slain one of the line of Senecas, who were closing in on the boys' fortress, and thus opened a gap in their ranks.

Preceded by the Mohawk, they went on again swiftly. In a moment or so they were at the edge of the forest. But at that time, when they began to feel that after all they might elude the enemy, a brilliant flash of lightning suddenly illuminated the night, making it as light as day.

The fugitives were seen by the Senecas, and as darkness again ensued they came bounding in pursuit of them. The Mohawk led the boys toward the shore of Lake George, which was now not far distant.

The boys knew that their Indian friend had a hunting lodge somewhere on the lake, and they supposed they were not far from it now.

This was presently proven to be true, for while they still held their own in the race for life, they came upon an Indian lodge standing in sight of the waters of the lake.

"This Manatock's lodge when on hunt. Canoe yonder," said the Mohawk, indicating first the lodge and then a clump of willows growing down into the water on the bank of the lake. The lightning was again illuminating the scene.

Darting forward to the willows, he pushed a large, well-made canoe out into sight.

Leaping into it, followed by the boys, Manatock seized the paddle and pulled away into the lake. The illumination of the lightning lasted but a minute. Then the darkness became more intense than ever.

Manatock paddled swiftly down the lake in the direction of the block house at the settlement of the Americans.

"We shall reach the block house in time to warn our friends of the intende attack by the French and Indians, and defeat of the intended attack by the French and Indians, and defeat

Manatock suddenly rested on his paddles, and they all listened intently. They heard the dip of paddles behind them.

"Senecas hab got canoe, too. Where get one? Injun don't know!" uttered Manatock in a tone of disgust. "White boys take gun. Be ready. Lightning come agin. Then white boys shoot Senecas if in range!"

Then he paddled away again as swiftly as possible.

Then came another brilliant flash of lightning, and the Block House Boys saw a large canoe containing five Seneca warriors close behind them. They discharged their guns simultaneously, and two of the Senecas fell. The others returned the boys' fire, but the darkness that instantly ensued favored the lads and their enemies' bullets went wide.

Manatock dropped the paddles.

"Mohawk run no furdur!" he uttered, in determined tones.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FRENCH AND INDIANS.

Manatock snatched up his gun. As he did so there came a flash of lightning. The Mohawk instantly discharged his gun. Bert and Val fired almost as quickly as Manatock, and their bullets disposed of the three Indians.

The journey on the lake was immediately resumed, and without further adventure the Block House Boys and Manatock arrived at the fort.

Of course there was great rejoicing over their safe return. Nettie Hastings greeted the boys joyfully, and she whispered to Bert, telling him she had endured misery during his absence, through fear for his safety.

Bert sought the commander of the block house and told him that the French and Indians were massing at Crown Point, and were about to attack them.

"Then no time must be lost in sending for reinforcements to Fort Edward down the lake," replied Colonel Hastings.

"And I have made a great discovery relating to Nate Badger. Since Badger was driven in disgrace from the settlement he has joined the Seneca Indians and became a chief. Colonel, I am convinced that Red Wolf, the most bloodthirsty of the hostile chiefs, and Nate Badger, the white renegade, are one and the same."

"Good heavens! And is he with the French and Indians who are coming to attack us?" asked the colonel, in startled tones.

"He is, and more than that, he is at the bottom of a plot to betray the block house into the hands of the French. He means to come here disguised, gain admission, and win confidence. Then at the proper time, when the enemy attacks the block house, he intends to open the doors for them."

"But we are warned. Thanks to you and your brave comrades, we will be on our guard against all strangers. And speaking of strangers reminds me. We had a strange guest during your absence."

The colonel went on to relate all the conversation he had with the scar-faced stranger during the latter's recent visit.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bert. "That man was surely Bart Blackwood, the author of the mysterious note my father received before his death."

Then Bert went on to explain about the history of his father's past, with which the reader has already been acquainted. Much surprise was evinced by Colonel Hastings, and the importance of the stranger's mission to the block house became evident to him.

"And now about sending to Fort Edward for reinforcements," finally said the colonel.

"We will go," volunteered Bert. "Let us have food and an hour's rest, and we'll be ready to start again."

"Ugh! Manatock go, too," said the Mohawk.

"Good! You three are the best scouts we have," said Colonel Hastings.

The boys were at once provided with refreshments, which Manatock shared. Then, after a short rest, they once more left the block house.

Meantime the French General Montcalm had arrived at the settlement of Crown Point, and the French and Indians were making for the American settlement of William Henry by a forced march.

Not long after the Block House Boys left the settlement to go to Fort Edward, further down the lake, the sentinel on the roof of the block house informed Colonel Hastings that the strange scarface, white-haired man who had previously visited the block house was again approaching.

Colonel Hastings ordered that he be allowed to come into the block house, and presently the stranger entered.

"Back again, eh? So you did not overtake the Shirley brothers. But they escaped from the Indians and arrived here in safety during your absence."

"I'm glad of that. Where are they now?" replied the man.

"Gone to Fort Edward to bring reinforcements. I told them you had been here, and they requested you to wait until they returned, if you came again."

"Then I will stay," responded the stranger.

While he and Colonel Hastings continued to converse let us follow the Block House boys and the friendly Mohawk.

The lads and the friendly Indian pressed on rapidly, and in due time reached Fort Edward, which was at this period commanded by Colonel Webb with four thousand men. The Block House Boys at once obtained an audience and acquainted the colonel with the situation at William Henry and the request of Colonel Hastings sent for immediate assistance.

Colonel Webb replied that he would send a thousand men within five hours' time. Relying on this promise the Block House Boys and Manatock set out to return to the settlement of William Henry. The Block House Boys had not made half the distance on their way back to the settlement when they were intercepted by a considerable band of hostile Indians. The boys and their Mohawk friend tried to reach the block house by making a detour. But when, having thrown their pursuers off the trail, they came in sight of the block house, what was their consternation to observe from the top of a hill which they had gained, that the French and Indians from Crown Point were in sight, advancing from the shores of Lake George.

After making a forced march, as stated, for a portion of the distance from Crown Point, the enemy had completed the journey by water. A long line of barges, provided by the French in advance, had been employed. Each barge had a large lateen sail, and under a favorable wind they had made the voyage down the lake in less than one-third the time it would have taken them to come by land.

This the boys and the Mohawk had not counted on.

"Oh, heavens! The block house is doomed! The reinforcements from Fort Edward cannot come in time now!" cried Bert.

"Let's reach the block house without a moment's delay," said the other lad.

They were about to descend the hill, when, just below, they saw a dozen Indians and a couple of Frenchmen passing under cover of the trees. Bert started violently as he saw this party, for he recognized one of the Frenchmen as Volmar Kilda, his deadly enemy. And Bert heard the villain say in incautious tones to his comrade:

"Nate Badger is now in the block house. I've seen his signal, that assures me our plot will succeed. He will open the doors to us, and then we'll hurl the Senecas in upon the garrison. The Shirley boys and all within the block house are doomed now."

The Frenchmen and the Indians of that band passed on.

"Now to reach the block house and expose Badger. After all, if the post can hold out for five hours the tables may be turned," said Val.

Then they started forward again. The Mohawk was in the lead. But a moment or so later they came face to face with Kilda and his redskins.

CHAPTER X.

MANATOCK'S DESPERATE MISSION.

For once at least Manatock was outwitted by the Senecas. When the hostiles passed on at the foot of the hill from which the Mohawk and the Block House Boys had discovered them, the Senecas caught a glimpse of one of the boys. Upon reaching the cover, the Senecas at once communicated their discovery to Colonel Kilda, and an ambush was immediately arranged. Manatock and the two Block House boys soon came in sight, and when the lads and their Mohawk ally came to the thicket the Senecas leaped out of their ambush and came face to face with the devoted trio.

Surprised though they were, Manatock and the Block House Boys acted with a promptitude that spoke well for their frontier training and rare presence of mind.

Instantly their guns sprang to their shoulders, and as the Senecas rushed at them the report of their three weapons rang out in one terrific crash.

The volley dropped three of the foremost Senecas in their tracks, and as they fell the Mohawk and the white lads plunged into the thicket. The enraged Senecas sent a volley of bullets after them. The leaden missiles cut the foliage all around the boys and their Mohawk ally, but by rare good fortune neither of them were hit. The Senecas almost immediately came in pursuit of the fugitives in the thicket. Meanwhile, the report of firearms and the yells of the Senecas had been heard by their comrades, and soon the boys and Manatock found that they were cut off from the fort.

The enemy had drawn their lines completely around the log fortress, and it would be certain doom to attempt to rush through that environment of fierce foemen.

Colonel Kilda's war party was yet in pursuit of the Block House Boys when the attack upon the block house began. Hearing the yells of their comrades and the report of their guns, the war party turned from the trail of the boys, seemingly irresistibly impelled to join in the more exciting work at the fortress. Colonel Kilda's presence was demanded to direct the attack, and he hastened to join the forces around the block house. The implacable hatred which he entertained for the Block House Boys prompted him to say:

"When the post is captured we will scour the forest and capture the boy spies, let them hide where they may. I'll send a thousand redskins to hunt them down."

Manatock and the white lads slackened their pace when they found that they were no longer pursued. Gaining a wooded height, whence they could command an unobstructed view of the blockhouse and its immediate surroundings, they watched the assault of the French and Indians.

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed the distraught Bert. "Manatock, can nothing be done to warn our friends that Nate Badger is in the block house?"

"Ugh! Mohawk no see the way," said Manatock, shaking his head negatively.

"Then God help the garrison. But Nate Badger shall answer with his life for his treachery yet," said Bert, in despairing, yet fierce and determined tones.

"Ugh! Manatock take um Badger's scalp, sure, some day. The Mohawk has spoken," replied the noble Indian.

A moment later there came a rustling sound in the adjacent

bushes. Manatock and the boys raised their guns and sprang behind adjacent trees, expecting to see an enemy appear.

But as the bushes almost immediately parted they beheld a white man of singular appearance step forth into plain sight.

From the description Colonel Hastings of the block house had given them of the strange man who sought their father and then themselves, the boys at once recognized the stranger as the mysterious "scar-face." But now the strange man was shorn of his long white locks. His hair was clipped closely and his clothing was not the same as he had worn when we saw him last.

Bert, Val and the Indian came from behind the trees.

The stranger uttered an exclamation of intense satisfaction as he gazed at the two boys, and then he said:

"I see your father's features in both your faces so plainly that I know you are Legrand Shirley's sons."

"Yes. We are the sons of Legrand Shirley, and you, I believe, are the stranger who came to the block house to see us," said Bert.

"Yes. But of that later. Now, let me tell you that a white renegade, by whom I was captured recently while looking for you, has gone to the blockhouse to personate myself. He and his Indians cut off my white hair, and of it the renegade made a rude wig. Then he painted his face like my scarred visage and appropriated my clothing. I fear he has deceived the garrison and means to work them some injury."

"Ah, now the secret is out! Nate Badger's disguise is known to us. Manatock, take a part of the stranger's Indian costume. Paint your face like a Seneca and try to reach the block house. You can mingle with the Senecas," said Bert.

Then Manatock quickly exchanged garments with the "scar-face," and painted his face anew to represent a Seneca on the warpath. This done, he glided stealthily away in the direction of the block house. In a moment he was out of sight in the surrounding bushes which grew thickly where the boys were now stationed.

"How did you escape from your recent captivity?" inquired Bert of the stranger, when Manatock was gone.

The scar-face explained, and his narrative showed that he had been captured, not long after his encounter with Kilda.

The stranger told the story of his subsequent escape from Badger modestly. The renegade had left him guarded by five Indians. He had freed himself, and single-handed slain every one of his captors. He was on his way to the fort to warn the garrison against Badger, when he came upon the Block House Boys, as shown.

Meanwhile Manatock went on toward the block house. Very soon he was mingling with the Senecas, who were engaged in the attack. In the excitement and confusion of the battle the Mohawk was accepted as a Seneca unquestioned, and he feigned to join the assault on the block house.

In that manner he was not long in making his way to the front ranks of the hostiles. All at once he fell. But he had not been struck by a shot, though it looked as though such was his fate. Immediately Manatock began to crawl away from the spot where he had fallen. There was yet a hundred yards to be traversed before he would reach the walls of the block house. But under the cover of the dense smoke and the partial concealment of the grass Manatock kept on unnoticed. At last he reached the wall of the block house. Then he crept to the door, intending to make himself known and gain admission.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MOHAWK ON HAND.

In the block house preparations for defense had been going forward ever since the boy scouts had brought the news of the intended attack by the French and Indians.

Every one was in a hopeful frame of mind, for all relied on the Block House Boys to bring them reinforcements from Fort Edward speedily. The appearance of the enemy so much sooner than they had looked for him was a great surprise to the garrison.

The first onset of the enemy was met by a fusillade of gun shots and a discharge from the two small cannon that astonished the howling savages and the French soldiers.

They were hurled back with considerable loss; and then the battle progressed with varying success; sometimes the assaulting party would get perilously near the fort. But each time, until Manatock, the Mohawk, arrived at the wall of the block house, the enemy had been finally repulsed.

Meanwhile Nate Badger, the renegade, was secretly at work inside the block house, intent upon carrying out the betrayal of the post which he had planned.

The arch villain was really the supposed "scar-faced man," as we have previously, almost positively indicated.

Nate Badger was yet unsuspected by anyone in the block house.

At first he took his place at a loop-hole and fired rapidly, seemingly as determined as any one to beat off the enemy.

But soon he crept away from his post, and as the conflict went on he stealthily made his way to the great doors of the stockade. He at once set about removing the heavy oaken bars and strong iron bolts with which the doors of the block house were secured. The last bolt was finally drawn by the arch traitor, and yet he had not been detected. It seemed that the fate of the block house was now dependent upon the occurrences of the next few moments.

If no one discovered that the doors were unfastened before the next determined charge of the enemy, surely the doom of the isolated American post would be consummated.

Having drawn the last bolt on the great doors, the renegade was about to withdraw to the nearest loop-hole, there to watch and wait for the arrival of the most favorable moment to throw open the portal, when all at once Colonel Hastings stepped into view around an adjacent angle in the wall of the stockade. As with the power of divination an idea of the truth flashed upon his mind, and he sprang at Nate Badger, exclaiming in tones of just indignation:

"Traitor! Scoundrel! You have unfastened the doors! You are in the service of the enemy!"

Badger was on the alert. As Hastings leaped at him he sprang aside. Then, like a flash, he clutched his gun, which he now held in his hand, and brought the stock down upon the colonel's skull with force. The commandant fell heavily.

Seeing that he was insensible Nate Badger drew his scalping-knife. His knife was raised to strike, and he aimed for the heart of the helpless man at his feet. But there was an interruption. At that moment of supreme peril for Colonel Hastings Manatock had arrived at the door of the block house.

He was hithering there when Colonel Hastings fell. As Nate Badger was about to deal the deadly blow of vengeance, Manatock dashed open one of the great doors and sprang inside.

The sudden appearance of the Indian arrested the renegade's knife in mid-air. Manatock leaped upon Nate Badger with a furious exclamation. A struggle ensued. But Manatock finally hurled Badger away, and then a blow from the back of the Mohawk's tomahawk stretched the renegade senseless beside the body of his intended victim. The struggle had been a terrific one. Manatock reeled against the log wall when it was over, and he was almost breathless.

Just then Nettie Hastings, who was in search of her father, came around the angle in the wall, and she beheld the thrilling scene before the doors of the block house. She sprang backward, uttering thrilling screams for help.

Manatock was momentarily speechless for want of breath.

The garrison was alarmed by Nettie's cries. In an instant a throng of men rushed to the gate. All saw, as they supposed, a bloodthirsty Seneca Indian inside the gate, and Colonel Hastings and the "scar-face" dead at his feet.

"Shoot down the infernal redskin! He has opened the gate and murdered our colonel and the stranger!" thundered an officer of the garrison, who was next in rank, under Colonel Hastings.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLOCK HOUSE BOYS TO RUN THE GAUNTLET.

The Mohawk dropped flat on the ground as the men of the block house garrison fired. The volley of bullets penetrated the log wall where he had stood, but not a shot struck him. Before the crash of the detonation died away Manatock cried:

"Me Manatock! Me friend!"

Colonel Hastings at that moment staggered to his feet, and he instantly recognized the friendly Mohawk's voice. So indeed did the others.

"Seize the villain! I saw him unfasten the gate. He was turning away from the doors, at least, as I came upon him," said Colonel Hastings, pointing at Badger.

"Him Nate Badger, the renegade the Seneca dogs call Red Wolf!" cried Manatock, and making a sudden leap at the traitor, he added: "Me take um scalp!"

Before anyone could interpose Manatock grasped Badger by the white hair. Then off came the rude wig.

Colonel Hastings now stayed the Mohawk's scalping-knife, saying:

"Hold! I would make this rascal a prisoner."

Nate Badger was by Colonel Hastings' command bound hand and foot and thrust into a small dark room in which ammunition had been stored. The door of this room was then secured, and all thought that they had made sure the renegade could not escape.

Then the Mohawk explained everything, precisely as the reader already knows it.

When Manatock stated that reinforcements could not reach the block house in less than five hours from the time of the departure of Manatock and his boy comrades from Fort Edward, Colonel Hastings started back and his face changed color.

Then, casting an anxious glance at Nettie, he bade her retire, saying:

"I have some private communications to make to the Mohawk."

Nettie walked away quietly. But she had read the expression of her father's face aright, and she knew that the news of the delay there was to be in the coming of the expected help filled him with alarm.

It was a terrible surprise to Colonel Hastings.

When Nettie was out of hearing he called his officers around him and quietly informed them of the news Manatock had brought. But dreading the moral effect upon the men, he requested that as yet the discouraging intelligence be not made known to them.

Meanwhile the conflict was on.

Manatock's entrance into the fort had not been observed by the enemy. If the worst came, to be a secret helper, to assist the imperiled whites, was Manatock's purpose.

He had long ago pledged his word to Bert Shirley to protect Nettie from danger in any event of her peril, and now the brave fellow was resolved to save Nettie.

The ammunition of the garrison began to fail as the day of dreadful conflict wore on. The frequency of the firing from the fort decreased for the defenders were husbanding their powder and bullets for a supreme crisis.

Manatock fought on the side of his friends, and many a Seneca fell under his deadly aim.

Meanwhile Bert and Val, accompanied by the scar-face, who was really Bart Blackwood, the man whom Colonel Kilda had sold to the Cherokee Indians, after a short consultation, decided that they would set out to return to Fort Edward, to carry the news of the arrival of the French and Indians at the block house, and, if possible, hasten the coming of the reinforcements. But they were not destined to carry out this resolution.

They made a short advance in the direction of the fort down the lake, when they were obliged to turn back. Kilda had sent out a band of scouts to lay between the two American forts.

The boys returned to the hill, where they had been stationed when Manatock left them. As the Mohawk did not return they concluded he had been successful in getting into the fort, or that he had fallen under the bullets of the defenders of the block house, who would take him for one of the enemy.

We need not dwell upon the conflict at the block house long. The massacre at William Henry is a matter of record in the annals of our country.

Finding that their ammunition was spent the garrison began to despair. The exultant enemy became bold. Blazing arrows showered upon the block house, and it was wrapped in flames.

Then, as the historians agree, the French promised the garrison that they should be treated as prisoners of war if they would surrender.

Despite Manatock's assurance that treachery was meant, and that the Senecas would have their scalps, the garrison surrendered.

The French officers entered the burning fort, and the garrison marched out with their women and children. Nate Badger was released, and he darted among the Senecas, who were for the moment held back by the French troops. Colonel Kilda placed a special guard around Colonel Hastings and his officers, and the commandant's daughter Nettie was at her father's side.

They were marched away.

A moment later the blood-curdling yells of the Senecas rang out more terrible than ever, and, glancing back, Colonel Hastings and his companions saw that the Senecas had fallen upon the survivors of the garrison, and that they were butchering them mercilessly, men, women and children.

"Stop that fiendish massacre! Have you no honor? Will you allow your men to slay my brave people, who have trusted to your word that they should have protection?" cried Colonel Hastings, rushing to Kilda.

"I am powerless to restrain the Indians. Your men have slain many of their braves, and they will have their revenge!" replied the arch villain coolly.

Then, despite his protests and appeals, Colonel Hastings and Nettie, with the other officers, were hurried away, and as they entered the forest the terrible yells of the savages and the groans and shrieks of the doomed settlers, as they were slain by the Senecas, continued to ring in their ears—a pandemonium of horror such as benumbs the heart and makes the blood run cold.

And what of Manatock?

He had slipped away in the confusion, and when Colonel Hastings and his party were marched into the forest the Mohawk saw them. In a few moments the faithful fellow was on their trail.

Meantime the Block House Boys witnessed the capture of the fort with such feelings of regret and horror as may be imagined. The enemy's scouts from down the lake presently

joined the main body and gave warning of the approach of the men from Fort Edward. Then the French and Indians retreated. When the reinforcements came up the Block House Boys joined them. They had seen Nettie and her father marched away. Now they sought for Manatock. Not finding him among the dead, they concluded he had followed the captives. The force from Fort Edward had come too late, and the officer in command refused to pursue Kilda's force, fearing an ambush in the forest. But the Block House Boys, accompanied by the scar-face, took the trail. The lads meant to rescue Nettie yet.

But it seemed fate was against them. Scarcely a mile from the block house, which was now a heap of blackened ruins, they were caught between two bands of the enemy and made prisoners. Then they were hurried on to a camp which the Indians had made. There they found Manatock, also a captive, bound to a stake, about which the Senecas had heaped fuel. Manatock's foes had doomed him to be burnt alive. As the boys were brought into the camp, Nate Badger appeared in the full garb of Red Wolf, the Senecas' war chief, and he said:

"Now the warriors shall make the white boys run the death gauntlet."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANGE OF CAPTORS.

The Block House Boys shuddered as they beheld Nate Badger in his disguise of Red Wolf, the bloodthirsty Seneca chief.

"Yes," repeated the renegade. "The white boys shall run the gauntlet. They have slain many of the Senecas, and the braves must have vengeance."

Fierce cries, exclamations of satisfaction, and exultant yells greeted the speaker's words.

He had proposed a terrible ordeal, which the savages were fond of making captives undergo.

"You dastardly villain!" cried Bert. "You are worse than the savages, for you have had all the benefits of civilization, and you are a white man, yet you have leagued yourself with the bloodthirsty Indians to make war upon your own race. For shame, Nate Badger! For shame!"

"Silence!" thundered the renegade, and in his rage he drew his hatchet from his belt and advanced upon the boy captives and their strange scar-faced companion.

"Ugh! Big chief spoil Seneca braves vengeance if kill white boys now," said a tall Indian as he quickly stepped between Badger and the young captives.

"Yes, yes, I forget myself. The gauntlet for the young rascals," assented the renegade.

He put his hatchet in his belt, and the two white lads and the "scar-face," otherwise Bart Blackwood, were bound to trees, near the stake to which Manatock, the friendly Mohawk was secured.

Some of the Senecas were yet busy heaping dry brush around the prisoner at the stake, and the heroic Mohawk was taunting them, after the manner of the Indians.

Among all the tribes it was considered an evidence of great bravery to meet torture defiantly, and without showing a sign of fear.

If Manatock was in fear and dread now that it seemed the cruel torture fire would soon consume him, he did not show it.

The Mohawk warrior held his noble head high, and his eyes flashed with the fire of hate and rage as he regarded his foes.

"The Senecas are dogs. They are cowards and all like old women. The Mohawk spits at them. They cannot fight. Let them release the Mohawk and he will show them how a warrior can slay such dogs as they are," said Manatock.

Perhaps the fire would have been set to the brush heaped

about the prisoner then, but Red Wolf called all the band together to form the terrible death gauntlet which he had doomed the Block House Boys to run.

The Senecas who had been busy preparing the torture fire about Manatock left him to join the rest of the band and engage in the horrible sport of the gauntlet.

And meanwhile the boys and Manatock had a moment for conversation, while the red fiends were arranging the gauntlet.

"How came you a captive, Manatock?" asked Val.

"Ugh! the Mohawk was captured in fight. Heap Senecas find him trail as him follow Colonel Hastings. Manatock made quick run. Soon find more Senecas ahead. Then both bands come at Manatock. Him make big fight. No good. Senecas too many. Manatock made prisoner," replied the Mohawk.

"And now we are all doomed and Nettie and her father are prisoners in the power of the French. Oh, Manatock, this is the darkest hour of all our lives," said Bert sadly.

"Ugh!" grunted the Mohawk. "White boys say true."

"But you must live! You must live to call Volmar Kilda to account! The man who had wronged your dead father and yourselves must yet be brought to justice," said the scar-face.

As yet the strange man had imparted nothing of the secret of the past relating to themselves, which the Block House Boys supposed he possessed.

But now he went on, speaking rapidly, and he said:

"My name is Bart Blackwood. Do you know if your dead father ever received a message from me, which should have been given him by a Cherokee Indian?"

"Yes," replied Bert.

"Then you probably know what the message was?"

"Yes. It stated that our grandfather made a will revoking the one he made disinheriting our father, and that the last will made our father the heir; also that you could produce that will, but were a prisoner among the Cherokee Indians, to whom you had been sold by Volmar Kilda."

"Yes, and all that is true. But unfortunately——"

"The savages are coming!" interrupted Val.

The further remarks of Bart Blackwood were cut short. The next moment Bert and Val were unbound from the trees to which they had been temporarily fastened.

The Senecas marched the two lads to the centre of the camp. The whole band of Indians was now drawn up in a double line, so as to leave a space of three feet between their ranks.

Each of the painted demons held some weapon ready to strike the Block House Boys when they were compelled to run between their lines.

At the head of the gauntlet the boys were unbound.

"Go!" yelled Nate Badger, and he and a couple of powerful Seneca braves pushed the lads forward between the lines of death.

The next moment they bounded down the gauntlet. But all at once Bert ducked his head and dashed it into the stomach of a big chief. Over went the redskin with all the breath driven out of his body.

In a trice, then, Bert and Val leaped over the fallen chief and broke through the lines of the gauntlet.

Away they darted at full speed.

The Senecas were surprised.

Rarely, if ever, had they met with a similar experience.

A captive doomed to run the death gauntlet seldom, if ever before, broke through the lines of his foes. The desperate daring of the Block House Boys had now given them a chance for their lives.

It was a slender chance.

Everything now depended upon their speed. If they could

distance the Senecas, who immediately came howling after them, all might be well. If not, then they would surely be recaptured again, and another chance would not be given them.

The hope of escape inspired the lads.

They strained every nerve and muscle in the race.

But it was not decreed that they were to elude their enemies it seemed, for all at once they heard a band of men in front.

Then they turned aside and tried to avoid the approaching party, but almost immediately they found themselves surrounded by a large party of French soldiers led by Colonel Kilda in person.

"Ha! The very lads I was coming to secure at Red Wolf's camp. These are the American boy spies," cried Kilda, as his men hemmed in the block house lads.

But Red Wolf and his Senecas now came up and while the rain began to descend from the dark storm clouds that had gathered in the sky, Red Wolf demanded the boys be surrendered to him, and the Indians clamored for their blood.

"No," said Colonel Kilda in response to the demand of Red Wolf, and the importunities of the Senecas. "These boys are the spies who escaped from Crown Point. They were then my personal prisoners. But now, since they are known to be spies, they are prisoners of war and they shall be tried and punished as such."

Red Wolf and his braves were compelled to content themselves with this decision.

The renegade drew Colonel Kilda aside and said:

"What will be the fate of the boys?"

"Death! They will be shot as spies," replied the Block House Boys' deadly foe.

"Good! Then I am satisfied. I only wished to rid myself of the boy who is my rival. You have not forgotten our agreement, which was made when I agreed to go to the block house in disguise?"

"No," replied Colonel Kilda.

"Then you may expect me soon to come to your camp to claim my reward for that dangerous undertaking. I mean the girl, Nettie Hastings."

"You shall have her," replied Kilda.

The Block House Boys did not hear a word of this conversation. They were marched away by Colonel Kilda.

Then Badger and his redskins returned to their camp. But the rain now descended in torrents and so the torture of Manatock was postponed. Indeed, the brush that had been heaped about the Mohawk and all the available fuel was so wet that it would not burn.

It seemed almost providential that the storm had occurred just at that time.

In no other way could the respite of the friendly Mohawk from this terrible doom have been secured.

The captive at the stake welcomed the rain.

"The Manito is good. The rain may save the Mohawk," muttered Manatock.

He knew that if the rain sufficiently soaked the buckskin thongs with which his captors had bound him to the torture post he might make them give so that he could free his hands. Once his hands were free he could soon loosen his other bonds.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RENEGADE CLAIMS NETTIE.

The French soldiers conducted the Block House Boys to a camp, where Colonel Kilda and his division of the army from Crown Point were located.

General Montcalm was encamped further north with the main force. The French and Indians hoped to draw the

American reinforcements into the forest and for this they were now waiting.

Colonel Kilda meant to give the boys, whom he feared and hated, no chance for their lives now.

By having them convicted as spies and executed, he believed he could forever rid himself of them in such a way that he would never be called to account for their death.

This idea had occurred to him when he first denounced the boys as spies. Even then he had concluded upon recapturing them, and having them tried and shot according to military usages.

Colonel Kilda was crafty and far-seeing. Since he knew that Bart Blackwood had escaped from the Cherokees he was in mortal dread lest the boys of the block house should learn a secret which the reader must surmise—that he was in unlawful possession of the inheritance which should have been the lads' father's and which now rightfully belonged to the young scouts themselves.

Colonel Kilda was not aware that Bart Blackwood, "the scarface," was now a captive in the camp of Nate Badger and his Indian allies.

If the plotting villain had known that there can be no doubt that he would have attempted to immediately put the man who held his secret to death.

Nate Badger did not know that the "scarface" was the custodian of any secret of Colonel Kilda. Had the renegade been aware of the fact, in all likelihood he would have made haste to inform his principal of his important capture.

In Colonel Kilda's camp Colonel Hastings and his daughter Nettie were now held prisoners. The fellow officers of the gallant Hastings had been sent on to General Montcalm.

The captive father and daughter occupied a tent in the French camp, and two sentinels stood guard at the door.

Moreover the prisoners' tent was in the centre of the camp, and even if the sentinels had been guilty of dereliction of duty, the captives could not have escaped, for sentinels were posted all around the encampment.

Colonel Kilda was something of a martinet, and he permitted no infraction of military duty among his forces.

Hearing the soldiers outside of the tent shouting a welcome to Colonel Kilda, Colonel Hastings and Nettie lifted the tent flap and looked out.

At that moment Kilda and the detachment who had the Block House Boys with them were marching into the encampment.

Colonel Hastings and Nettie saw the lads.

"Oh, father!" cried the girl, in tones of deepest consternation and solicitude. "They have captured Bert and Val. Now I fear Kilda will show the brave lads no mercy."

"I share your fears, my dear," replied Colonel Hastings.

"Can nothing be done for Bert and Val? Father, you must intercede for them. Speak to Colonel Kilda. Entreat him to treat the boys as prisoners of war. You know that the strange scarfaced man told you at the block house that Kilda wanted to have Bert and Val slain," continued Nettie.

"I remember, and I will speak to Kilda," responded Colonel Hastings.

A moment later, as Kilda was passing the tent of the captives, Colonel Hastings called out to him, saying:

"Colonel Kilda, can I have a word with you?"

"What, now?" demanded Kilda gruffly as he halted.

"I want to speak to you about the two boys you have just brought into camp. They are regular members of the garrison of the block house, and I call upon you to treat them as prisoners of war," said Colonel Hastings.

"That is precisely my intention regarding them. They are spies. I shall treat them as such prisoners of war are always treated. They shall be tried and executed."

Kilda stalked on and, although Colonel Hastings entreated him to spare the boys, and declared that they were not spies, the villain would not listen.

Nettie Hastings was heartbroken.

"Oh, heaven have mercy! That terrible man will have Bert and Val shot, and we are powerless to save them!" she cried, wringing her hands in mental distress.

Colonel Hastings could not comfort her.

Indeed he believed that the fate of the two young frontier heroes was sealed. Hope of their rescue he had none, and certainly he had not the slightest thought that Kilda would relent.

Bert and Val were bound to a couple of trees in plain sight of the tent occupied by Nettie and her father.

Colonel Kilda retired to his tent to arrange for the form of a military trial which he meant to give the Block House Boys.

"We are lost now. This time Kilda will make sure we do not slip through his hands, and with Manatock and the scar-face, Bart Blackwood, captives in Red Wolf's camp, there is no one at large to render us the least assistance," said Bert.

Val assented in hopeless words.

Then in silence and despair the two boy captives awaited what was to come.

But a short time, however, elapsed, and then Nate Badger, still in the full costume of Red Wolf, the chief of the Senecas, entered Colonel Kilda's camp.

The renegade uttered some taunting remark to the boys as he strode by them on the way to the tent of Colonel Kilda.

The boys made no rejoinder to the vindictive renegade, and a moment subsequently he passed from their sight and stood in the presence of Colonel Kilda within the latter's tent.

A moment or so elapsed.

Then Colonel Kilda and Nate Badger emerged from the tent of the former.

Nate Badger had claimed Nettie Hastings as his prize, and Colonel Kilda had raised some objection. The truth was that the scoundrel had a half formed purpose of making Nettie his own unwilling bride. Since he parted with Badger in the woods he had been casting about for some excuse to retain the girl in his own power.

In his tent he had just told Badger that he had concluded that he must himself hold Nettie as a prisoner of war.

Then Badger became enraged, and he stalked out of the tent, vowing if the girl was not surrendered to him he would draw off all the Senecas from the service of the French.

Colonel Kilda in alarm at this threat followed Badger, and he concluded he would have to keep faith with the renegade.

"I demand the girl Nettie Hastings. You are to give her up to me. You must keep your word," cried Badger outside of Kilda's tent.

Nettie and her father as well as the two Block House Boys heard his words.

The young girl sprang into her father's arms.

"Oh, father, protect me!" she cried, in terror.

"Well," said Kilda, in response to Badger, "since you insist, you shall have the girl."

Then he turned to the sentinels at the doors of the tent occupied by Nettie and her father and said:

"Bring out the prisoners!"

Colonel Hastings and his daughter at once came out of the tent.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Nettie. "Oh, Colonel Kilda, do not give me to that merciless savage!" and she indicated the disguised renegade. Colonel Hastings recollected that the Block House Boys had told him Red Wolf and Badger were one. But Nettie seemed to have forgotten that.

"He is no Indian! Ah! What have I said?" exclaimed Colonel Kilda. Too late he knew he had blundered.

"You have unwittingly betrayed me. But the girl may as well know the truth now. I am Nate Badger!" cried the renegade. Then he suddenly sprang forward and seized the young girl in his arms.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BLOCK HOUSE BOYS SENTENCED TO BE SHOT AS SPIES.

Colonel Hastings would have struck down the arch villain who dared thus to seize Nettie, but as he made a leap at the disguised renegade, the two sentinels, in obedience to a signal from Kilda, grasped him by the arms and held him fast.

"Hold! For God's sake, Colonel Kilda, if you are a soldier and an officer, you will not permit this outrage!" cried Colonel Hastings in agony.

Kilda turned his back and made no reply.

Nettie screamed in terror and vainly strove to free herself from Badger's hold.

"Ho! Ho!" cried the renegade. "How the mighty are fallen. You had me driven from the settlement in disgrace, Colonel Hastings, and I swore then to have my revenge. Now my hour of triumph has come!"

Mentally Colonel Hastings' agony was terrible, but the feelings of Nettie's boy lover—daring Bert Shirley—may be imagined as more intense and terrible even than the emotions of the father.

Bert struggled madly to release himself.

Suddenly, to his surprise, the cords with which he had been bound to the tree snapped, and he was free.

He had brought against them such a severe strain, under the inspiration of the moment, that the stout cords had broken as if a giant had pulled against them.

Under circumstances of great peril persons often accomplish achievements which, ordinarily, they would have been entirely incapable of accomplishing.

Such was the case now with Bert Shirley.

The moment he found himself at liberty he sprang forward and snatched up the gun belonging to one of the sentinels, who had dropped the weapon when he seized Colonel Hastings.

The Block House Boy leveled the weapon at Nate Badger, and he shouted:

"Release the girl, or I fire!"

Despite the danger of hitting Nettie, the young marksman was in earnest. He believed he could bring down the renegade and leave Nettie unscathed.

But quick as thought Nate Badger changed his position, and placed Nettie between himself and Bert Shirley.

The boy was baffled then, as regarded shooting.

But clubbing the gun he rushed at Badger.

There were many French soldiers spectators of the scene. A number of the soldiers now advanced at a run. Before Bert could inflict a blow upon Badger he was surrounded and overpowered, but not before he had felled more than one of the enemy by a blow from his clubbed weapon.

Then Nate Badger lifted the now half-fainting girl in his arms and bounded away. In a moment or so he was clear of the camp, and Bert saw him pass out of sight into the dense forest with the captive maiden, whom he was carrying away to a fate worse than death.

"Colonel Kilda!" shrieked Nettie's distracted father; "as heaven hears me and spares my life, you shall one day be called to account for permitting this outrage. General Montcalm shall hear all. I cannot believe that the French commander will uphold you in your villainy!"

The villainous Kilda retorted sneeringly:

"You forget that you, too, are at my mercy. Take care that you are not yourself given over to the redskins."

Then, having seen Colonel Hastings returned to his tent and Bert Shirley bound to the tree as before, Kilda called together the officers of his command.

Under the spreading branches of a great tree he held a military tribunal, and Bert and Val Shirley were tried as spies.

When the informal court reached a certain point in its proceedings the two boys were marched before the tribunal and Colonel Kilda said:

"What have you to say as to why the sentence of death should not be pronounced against you as spies?"

"Only that we are not spies and guilty of no crime," replied Bert.

"Your denial is useless. You have been found guilty," said Colonel Kilda.

Then he added impressively, while all the officers stood up and removed their hats:

"The sentence of this military court is that you, Bert, and you, Val Shirley, be shot to-morrow at sunrise."

The boys turned white as death as they heard the sentence.

But they made no protest, for they knew it would avail them nothing to do so.

They were marched back to the trees to which they had previously been bound and again secured. This time Colonel Kilda personally superintended the binding of the boys. They were so tied that it would be impossible for them to liberate themselves under any circumstances.

The ensuing night was one of despair and grief for the Block House Boys.

They fully believed that their young lives were to end when the sunlight of a new day again dispelled the darkness. How terrible was their situation. They had so much to live for—life was so sweet!

Bert groaned aloud as he thought that in a few hours Nettie Hastings would no longer have him to strive to save her. The bitterness of the lad's fate was intensified by the reflection that Nettie was at the mercy of the bloodthirsty renegade, Nate Badger.

The hours wore on, and it was very near the first coming of the dawn, when Bert caught sight of a shadowy form moving stealthily along the ground and coming toward him.

In a moment more he knew that a man was crawling noiselessly in his direction. Bert almost held his breath in the intensity of excitement. But suddenly his heart leaped to his throat. He had made a great discovery. The approaching man's face became visible under the imperfect moonlight, for the rain had ceased and the dark clouds had drifted away.

Bert Shirley recognized the face of the man who was coming toward him as silently as a serpent.

The man was "the scarface."

"Yes. There was no mistake. Bart Blackwood, the man who held Colonel Kilda's secret, was approaching."

Very soon he gained Bert's side, and quickly severed the cords that bound the lad. Then, enjoining silence, he stole to Val and released him also.

A moment subsequently the Block House Boys and the man Colonel Kilda had sold into slavery among the Cherokee Indians were stealing out of the French camp.

They got by the sentinels unseen and crept away into the forest, where the gloomy shadows welcomed them and gave them hiding.

Bart Blackwood hastily explained that he had managed to escape by straining the thongs of skin, with which he had

been bound, after those fetters had become saturated by the rain, so as to give considerably.

The stranger stated that Manatock was still a prisoner, and that Red Wolf, otherwise Nate Badger, the renegade, had brought Nettie Hastings to the Indian camp and placed the girl in charge of an old medicine woman who followed the fortunes of the Seneca band.

"We must rescue Nettie and save Manatock," said Bert.

"Yes. We will try to do so. But we must make haste. The dawn will soon come and then Manatock will be burnt at the stake, for he was only respited because of the rain," assented Bart Blackwood.

Then the trio went on swiftly to the renegade's camp.

They were not long in reaching it, and first they determined to attempt to rescue Manatock. The scarface started to crawl into the camp, after discovering that an Indian who had been standing guard beside the Mohawk earlier was no longer on the watch. The stake to which Manatock had been bound stood in the shadow of a great tree. Blackwood was pretty near it when he saw that Manatock was gone. A moment more and he came upon the dead body of the Indian guard. Then he knew Manatock had escaped unaided.

The strange man was creeping back to the Block House Boys whom he had left on the edge of the camp, when Red Wolf or Nate Badger came out of a tepee and walked toward the stake, at which Manatock had been bound. In a moment the renegade discovered the escape of the Mohawk and he uttered the alarm yell of the Senecas. The camp was all astir in a moment and a keen-eyed warrior caught sight of Blackwood. The ensuing moment the entire band of redskins were dashing at the "scarface."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SACRIFICE AT THE MANITO'S ROCK.

Pursued by the Senecas and Red Wolf or Nate Badger, the renegade, Bart Blackwood, "the scarface," did not run toward the place where he had left the Block House Boys at the edge of the camp.

Of course he knew that if he shaped his course to the hiding place of the boys, he would cause the lads to be discovered by their enemies.

Wishing to shield the boys he took a course which would lead his pursuers away from the lads' place of concealment.

But all at once Blackwood met with a mishap which threatened to cause his capture.

As he was bounding forward at full speed he stumbled and fell heavily.

With exultant yells the savages pressed on toward the unfortunate man at increased speed. They were sure of his capture now and, indeed, it did seem that little short of a miracle could save the "scarface," for he lay motionless.

The fact was he had struck his head on the exposed root of a great tree as he fell, and he was partially stunned.

From their hiding place the Block House Boys, who had been eagerly watching all the movements of Blackwood, witnessed his accident.

The strange man had fallen within gunshot of the concealed lads.

By firing on the approaching savages the boys saw that they could check the rush of the Senecas upon Blackwood for a moment at least, and there was a bare chance that such a proceeding might give him time to regain his feet and escape the Indians even yet.

Bert's gun sprang to his shoulder.

Val also leveled his weapon.

"If we fire we shall reveal our presence to the enemy," said Val.

"Yes, but we must not let that consideration prevent our shooting to save a friend," replied Bert.

"No, no," assented Val.

Then both lads discharged their weapons. They had taken careful aim, and both their shots told. Two of the redskins who were foremost in the pursuit of Blackwood fell.

Almost at the same moment the imperiled white man regained his feet and bounded forward.

Now that the boys had revealed their presence, the scarface had no motive for leading the Indians away from them, so he renewed his flight in the direction of the lads.

The shots discharged by the Block House Boys served only to check the pursuit of Blackwood for a moment.

Then on came the whole yelling legion of red warriors as swiftly as before.

Blackwood reached the boys and all three of the whites dashed away.

But then the Indians began to discharge their guns, and those who carried bows sent well-aimed arrows hurtling at the fugitives in a dangerous shower.

Suddenly Val threw up his hands and fell heavily.

Bert stopped instantly and tried to lift his brother up and carry him. Blackwood came to his assistance.

"He is not dead. His heart beats yet. I'll never leave him to the tomahawk and scalping knife of the savages," said Bert.

"Nobly said. We will strive to carry him on with us," replied Blackwood.

They lifted the insensible form of the lad between them and started forward again.

But the momentary delay had enabled their pursuers to gain upon them.

Burdened as they now were with the insensible lad, Bert and Bart Blackwood's speed was materially decreased.

Steadily the Indians gained upon them as the desperate race was continued.

But the white fugitives would not abandon Val.

"We must make a stand here!" all at once cried Blackwood, when the Senecas were close upon them.

Since the two unharmed fugitives had burdened themselves with their unfortunate companion the Senecas had become so certain of running them down that they refrained from firing at them further.

As Blackwood last spoke he bounded over a fallen tree. Bert did the same. Then depositing Val upon the ground Blackwood and the uninjured lad crouched down behind the fallen tree and leveled their guns over it.

On came the savages. Blackwood and Bert fired simultaneously, and two of the foremost Senecas fell. But the rush was not checked. On came the savages still. Instantly they surged over the fallen tree. There was a brief but desperate hand-to-hand fight between them and the boy of the Block House and Blackwood.

Then the whites were overpowered.

Just then Val staggered to his feet.

He had not been seriously hurt after all. A bullet had grazed his skull and knocked him senseless. Beyond that he was unharmed.

The attention of the redskins were centered upon Bert and Blackwood. They did not observe Val had recovered.

In the mad fury of the moment, when Bert and his comrade were overpowered, one of the savages, whose brother Bert had just slain, rushed upon the lad with his hatchet raised to cleave the white youth's skull.

Val saw his brother's peril, and, upon the instant, he snatched up a gun one of the Senecas had dropped, and shot the murderous Indian through the heart just in time to save Bert.

But then Val, too, was overpowered.

Then the savages began to bind their captives. But all at once Blackwood threw off two of the redskins who held him and made a terrific leap into an adjacent thicket. The dense foliage instantly concealed him. Several Indians bounded after "the scarface," but they returned in a short time without him; Blackwood had eluded them.

The boys were hurried back to the renegade's camp.

There Nate Badger met them, and it is needless to say that the renegade exulted greatly over their capture.

The Senecas now clamored loudly for the blood of the white captives. Red Wolf, the renegade, decided that the captives should be slain.

"If Colonel Kilda calls me to account for not returning the Block House Boys to him again I will claim that I was powerless to restrain the enraged Senecas from taking their lives."

"Braves," then said Badger to his red followers, "the white lads who have slain our brothers shall die. The Manito's rock has not yet had a sacrifice in some moons. Let the blood of the captives flow on the spot where the ancient Senecas sacrificed their victims in other days before the white man came across the big waters in his great canoes."

A shout of approval from the redskins greeted this speech.

Then the boys were hurried away to a cave at no great distance; torches were procured by the Indians and lighted; the boys were marched into the cavern and bound hand and foot; they were placed upon a great red stone in the centre of the underground place.

Then Badger and all his savages retired from the cave, and the two boys were left alone in the darkness, unable to move hand or foot.

It was the custom of the Senecas of those early days to sacrifice their victims on some occasions. To this day a great rock, in Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, and called Queen Mary's Rock, after an Indian queen, is pointed out to the tourist who visits the scene of the massacre in that valley during the revolutionary war. On Queen Mary's Rock the savages used to sacrifice their white captives.

Badger and his band proceeded to draw lots to decide who should have the office of executioner, and the fatal lot fell to the white renegade.

Nothing loath to slay the helpless lads, he drew his murderous scalping knife and crept alone into the cave of the Manito's rock.

It was the custom of the executioner to slay the victims alone, it seemed.

Some moments elapsed.

The band of savages outside of the cave began to grow impatient. They seemed to think that the execution was consuming too much time, as Badger did not reappear.

But when what the savages regarded as an unreasonably long time had elapsed, and just as some of their number were proposing that they should go into the cave, fearing that there was something wrong, Badger came out of it, waving his blood-dripping scalping knife above his head, and yelling exultantly:

"The white boys are slain! The Manito is pleased, and the Senecas are avenged! Whoop! Whoop! Whoop!"

Besides the opening through which the boys had been taken into the cave, there was no other way into or out of it. While Badger was in the cave its entrance was closely guarded. It was impossible for the boys to free themselves. No one could possibly have entered to liberate them without being seen by the Indians.

CHAPTER XVII.

MANATOCK AND WYONA.

Left alone in the gloomy cave of the Manito's Rock, while Badger and the redskins were deciding as to who should en-

act the role of executioner, the Block House Boys experienced feelings of intense terror and despair.

The situation was terrible enough to try the nerves and test the courage of the bravest of men, and it was little wonder that the Block House Boys trembled from head to foot, and shuddered at every sound.

Many times before he really came, they fancied that they could hear the stealthy footsteps of the executioner approaching them.

But at length the darkness of the cave was illuminated, the boys saw Nate Badger coming toward them from the mouth of the cave.

In one hand the renegade carried a pine torch, and its light dispelled the darkness, and flashed from the glittering blade of his murderous scalping knife, which he held in the other hand.

The boys struggled madly to free themselves, but in vain, and the renegade, who was coming to slay them stole nearer and nearer.

The light from his blazing torch lit up his evil face, and showed his terrible purpose in its murderous expression.

The boys believed that at last their doom was sealed beyond all possibility of deliverance through human agency.

Finally Badger paused beside the great red stone rock upon which his victims lay. Then he set his blazing torch on end in the ground, and was ready to begin the bloody task he had come to execute.

"You shall die first, Bert Shirley," hissed the renegade, and then he raised his knife above the heart of the boy hero to deal the fatal blow. Bert closed his eyes, and with a prayer in his heart awaited the doom that so closely menaced him.

Then he heard a dull thud, and opening his eyes he saw Nate Badger outstretched upon the floor of the cave close beside the rock.

Over the fallen renegade stood a familiar form. Bert Shirley's heart leaped to his throat at that instant, under the impulse of the revulsion of feelings which he experienced.

"Ugh!" grunted the man who stood over the fallen renegade. "Manatock strike down Badger! Um no kill white boy now!"

The speaker was the friendly Mohawk who had promised the dying father of the Block House Boys to stand by and protect the lads always.

But how came he there?

The explanation is simple, miraculous though his most timely appearance certainly seemed to the Block House Boys.

Manatock had secreted himself in the cave of the Manito's Rock before the white boys captives were brought there.

But he had been secreted in a side passage of the cave, at some distance from the Manito's Rock, and he had only discovered the boys as Nate Badger was about to slay them.

So Manatock explained to Bert and Val as he quickly severed the thongs with which their captors had secured them.

The Mohawk also added:

"Rain make buckskin thongs that bound Mohawk stretch. So um get away from stake. Kill guard 'fore he see Manatock free. Then come here."

Bert and Val, as soon as they were free, leaped down from the "Manito's Rock," and wrung the hands of their devoted Indian friend warmly.

"What now?" said Bert.

"Manatock fool Senecas heap. Make 'em think he Red Wolf or Nate Badger," replied Manatock.

Then he quickly appropriated the garments of the renegade, whom he had knocked senseless with one blow of his clubbed gun.

In a few minutes Manatock looked exactly like Badger.

It was not daylight yet outside, and he meant to cause the

Senecas to think that the white boys were dead. The absence of daylight favored his ruse, which he hastened to explain to the boys.

Then he added:

"Boys, stay here till Manatock come back."

Bert and Val assented, for they comprehended that only Manatock's daring ruse could save them, for certainly, if they were not soon visited by the redskins, it would be because the latter supposed Badger had executed them.

Manatock proceeded to bind and gag the renegade.

"White boys wonder why Manatock no kill um Badger?" asked the Mohawk, while he was thus engaged.

"Yes," assented Bert.

"Mohawk heap cunning. Um keep Badger prisoner to exchange for Colonel Hastings," replied the Mohawk.

"Bravo! You are a trump, Manatock!" exclaimed Bert in delight.

Having secured Nate Badger to his satisfaction, Manatock gave him a slight slash on the hand with his knife, and then rushed out of the cave with the blood-stained weapon, as we have seen.

The Senecas were completely deceived.

They accepted Manatock as Red Wolf, and he led them back to the renegade's camp. As soon as that place was reached the Mohawk improved the first chance that he found to steal away unseen. He succeeded in leaving the camp undetected.

Then he hastened back to the cave in which he had left the Block House Boys. Arriving there, he found the boys all right, and Badger was still a captive.

"What of Nettie Hastings?" asked Bert as soon as Manatock returned.

"White gal in care of old Wyona, the medicine woman of the Senecas."

"Ah! And Wyona is your friend because you once saved her life. I remember we procured disguises at her cave," replied Bert.

"Ugh! Yes, Wyona now with renegade's band."

"Can you not rely on her friendship to cause her to give up the girl I love to you?"

"Manatock don't know. Years ago Colonel Hastings shot and killed Wyona's brother—Chief Chepata—in battle. Wyona hate Hastings; maybe hate white gal, too."

"But you will save Nettie?" implored Bert.

"Manatock do um best."

"Good! Then I have confidence that you will succeed."

"Manatock hope so."

The Mohawk went on to say that Wyona's tepee was set up on the outskirts of the renegade's camp.

"Now, Manatock, go to Wyona's lodge, try bring white girl back here. Boys wait, Manatock come again soon," continued the Mohawk.

Then he shouldered his gun and left the cave again.

He went straight to Wyona's lodge, and boldly entered it. In his disguise of Red Wolf or Badger he did not fear detection.

Wyona was alone in the lodge with Nettie Hastings when Manatock entered. At the sight of the man whom she believed to be Badger, the young girl uttered a cry of alarm and retreated to the furthest end of the lodge.

Manatock had resolved to try to deceive Wyona and get her to allow him to take Nettie away under the impression that he was Red Wolf.

The Mohawk knew that the old medicine woman was very bitter against all who bore the name of Hastings, and he feared that not even her friendship for him would cause her to let him restore the maiden to her friends.

But the friendly Indian was fully resolved that, if he could

not take the girl captive away from the old medicine woman peacefully, then he would resort to force.

"Red Wolf has come for the white girl," said the Mohawk.

"Ugh! chief take white squaw then," assented old Wyona.

"Come with me," said Manatock to Nettie, and with a sudden leap he reached the side of the shrinking girl, caught her up in his arms, and started to leave the lodge.

But suddenly old Wyona snatched up a gun, and springing before Manatock leveled the weapon full at his heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MANATOCK OUTWITS WYONA.

Manatock recoiled before the leveled weapon in the hands of old Wyona, the medicine woman.

The Mohawk was completely surprised.

His gun was now slung from his shoulder by a strap, for both his hands were employed to hold the white girl captive.

Old Wyona, so to say, now had the Mohawk completely at her mercy. It flashed upon Manatock's mind that in some way the Seneca medicine woman had all at once detected that he was a renegade.

"Who are you? Speak, or Wyona will shoot!" said the medicine woman.

"I am Red Wolf," replied Manatock.

"You speak with a crooked tongue."

"How know? Wyona wrong."

"No, Wyona is right. Badger has the little finger of his left hand missing!"

Then Manatock remembered that what the old medicine woman said was true. The renegade really had lost the little finger of his left hand by the accidental explosion of a gun, a year before.

"You are a foe! Wyona shoot!" cried the red hag fiercely.

Her finger was on the trigger. Manatock knew his peril.

"Hold!" he cried; "I am Manatock, the Mohawk—he who once saved Wyona's life."

"Prove it," demanded the medicine woman, still keeping her gun leveled, and with her finger yet on the trigger.

Manatock lifted his right hand as he released Nettie Hastings, and quickly removed Red Wolf's head-dress and wiped the fresh paint from his face.

"Ah, you are Manatock," said Wyona. She was convinced, as she recognized the Mohawk. "Why come for white girl?" she demanded, as Nettie uttered a cry of joy when she understood that she had a friend at hand.

"Manatock would restore the white girl to her friends," replied the Mohawk.

The old medicine woman frowned darkly, as she replied:

"It cannot be."

"Why not? Wyona will let the white girl go for Manatock's sake?"

"No. The white squaw is the child of the slayer of Wyona's brother."

"But white girl has done Wyona no harm."

"She is the slayer's child."

"Manatock begs for her."

"Wyona will not let her go. Anything else she will do for Manatock."

"He gave you your life."

"Wyona has not forgotten."

"But she has a hard heart."

"She longs for revenge on all that have the blood of the slayer in their veins."

Manatock saw the medicine woman would not consent to let him rescue Nettie.

Then he called his cunning to his assistance by suddenly exclaiming:

"What's that? Ugh!"

The Mohawk pointed behind the old medicine woman. She involuntarily turned in the direction he indicated.

Then Manatock's clenched fist struck her a heavy blow on the back of the head, and she fell in a heap at his feet and remained motionless.

"Ugh! Manatock had to do it," uttered the Mohawk.

Then he led Nettie from the lodge.

As they went forth the Indian said:

"White girl, have no fear. Manatock true friend. Him take white girl to Block House Boys."

"Oh, Manatock, are they free?" Nettie asked.

"Yes, and Manatock left boys all safe in cave."

"Thank Heaven for their preservation!"

"Ugh! Great Spirit on side of white boys!" said the Indian.

Walking rapidly Manatock led Nettie from the camp.

The Seneca warriors saw him and the maiden. But they suspected nothing of the truth, and so no one interposed to prevent their departure.

As soon as they were under cover of the woods and out of sight of the renegade's camp, Manatock led Nettie on more rapidly yet.

While they went in the direction of the cave, the Indian explained the escape of the boys from what had seemed certain death in the cavern.

Meantime there was an arrival at the cave.

Bert and Val were at the entrance of the cavern watching and waiting for the return of the Mohawk.

Presently they caught sight of Bart Blackwood. Almost at the same time "the scar-face" caught sight of the lads.

Then he hastened to join them, and mutual explanations were made. They were still talking when Manatock and Nettie came in sight. Bert ran to meet them, and the joy the young lovers experienced in the reunion may be imagined.

All soon entered the cave, and a consultation was held.

Manatock proposed to visit the camp of Colonel Kilda, and open negotiations looking to making the exchange of Nate Badger, the renegade, for Colonel Hastings, Nettie's father.

All approved the Mohawk's plan.

Manatock prepared to set out upon his dangerous mission.

"If Manatock no come back in three hours, he never come. Then shoot Badger," said the Mohawk.

Then Manatock, after giving his friends a word or two of warning—to be constantly on the alert to guard against discovery, took his departure.

Manatock traversed the forest swiftly after leaving the cave, and in a short time he arrived at the cabin of Colonel Kilda.

The sentinels around the camp allowed Manatock to pass them unquestioned, for they took him for Badger, the renegade, whom the Indians called Red Wolf.

The Mohawk went boldly through the French camp to the tent of Colonel Kilda.

Unannounced, he thrust aside the flap of the buckskins that shielded the door of the tent and entered.

Colonel Kilda was alone in his tent.

"Ah, Badger! I did not anticipate seeing you so soon again. I hope you bring me news of the Block House Boys, who gave me the slip last night," said Kilda.

Manatock suddenly raised his gun and aimed the weapon at the arch villain as he said:

"Me not Badger the renegade."

As he spoke Manatock heard some one at the door of the tent.

CHAPTER XIX.

MANATOCK ARRANGES FOR AN EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS.

As Manatock made the thrilling announcement, "Me not Badger the renegade," Colonel Kilda sprang to his feet.

But the Mohawk's gun covered the villainous colonel, and Manatock added:

"Mohawk kill if utter a word."

The Indian's finger was on the trigger of his gun, and Kilda was intensely alarmed. He did not doubt that the Mohawk would shoot him down if he attempted to give an alarm, and so he was silent.

The person Manatock had heard at the door of the tent was a sentinel pacing his beat. The soldier had been at the end of it when the Mohawk entered Colonel Kilda's quarters. He was now passing the door, but he did not look in.

This was fortunate indeed for Manatock, who was preparing for swift and desperate action.

The sentinel passed on.

As his footsteps died away in the distance Manatock said, while he still kept his gun leveled at Kilda:

"Me Manatock, the Mohawk; me friend of Block House Boys."

"What do you want here?" demanded Kilda.

"Mohawk have Nate Badger, called Red Wolf by Senecas, a prisoner. Kilda has white prisoner."

"You mean Colonel Hastings, the commander of the block house?"

"Yes. Mohawk want to exchange Badger for Chief Hastings."

"You rascal! How would you make the exchange?"

"Fur chief send two warriors with Colonel Hastings to forks of stream, a little way south, when Mohawk has gone."

"Yes. And will you have Badger there?"

"Yes. Mohawk so promise."

"Suppose I refuse?"

Manatock tapped his gun significantly as he replied:

"Mohawk come to save Colonel Hastings. He will do it or carry away Kilda's scalp."

Manatock spoke fiercely. His eyes flashed. He was in deadly earnest. Kilda realized this, and he hastened to reply:

"And if I consent to your proposal to exchange prisoners?"

"Then Mohawk go away and no hurt Chief Kilda."

"Your impudence is superb."

"But Kilda must go with Mohawk to edge of camp so he can't give alarm, for fear Mohawk shoot."

Kilda ground his teeth in rage, and stealthily reached for a pistol in his belt.

But the Mohawk saw the movement, and he said fiercely:

"Kilda put pistol on ground."

The villain did not dare refuse to obey, and he reluctantly pulled the weapon from his belt, and dropped it.

As he had discarded the sword, which he wore as an officer of the French army, before Manatock entered, Kilda was now unarmed.

"Now will Kilda make exchange of prisoners? Speak quick. Mohawk in heap hurry," said Manatock. He was in momentary dread lest some enemy should visit the tent.

"Yes. I am compelled to consent," said Kilda.

"Then come with Injun to edge of camp. If Kilda make even a sign to betray him, Mohawk shoot," rejoined Manatock.

Then he held aside the tent-flap, and Kilda passed out ahead of him. A moment subsequently the disguised Mohawk and the French colonel were walking through the camp.

As, of course, the soldiers still took Manatock for Red Wolf, no suspicion of the daring stratagem which the Indian was working out entered their minds.

Soon the Mohawk and Kilda arrived at the confines of the camp. Then the former halted and said:

"Kilda has done well not to try to betray Mohawk. Now um go. Let him not fail to send Chief Hastings to the stream as he has promised, for if the white prisoner is not there in two hours' time, Manatock will send Kilda the scalp of Badger."

"I'll keep my word," replied Kilda.

Then Manatock entered the woods, and hastened away while Kilda returned to his tent mortified and chagrined, as he thought how he had been compelled to make terms with the Indian.

Manatock made his way swiftly through the woods.

Meantime old Wyona had regained consciousness and recovered from Manatock's blow. But knowing it was now too late she did not immediately give the alarm to the Indians of Badger's band that the white girl had escaped.

But finally she went in search of Badger to inform him. Of course she failed to find Badger in the Indian camp, and then she went to the encampment of the French, in quest of the renegade. Arriving there she proceeded to the tent of Kilda, and asked the French colonel for Badger, telling him that the renegade had disappeared from his own camp.

Kilda informed Wyona that he had just learned that Badger was a captive in the hands of the enemy, and then Wyona told of the white girl's escape.

Manatock met with no adventure worthy of special record on his way back to the cave after leaving the French camp.

The Block House Boys and Blackwood, the scar-face, welcomed Manatock as he re-entered the cave.

"What success? Oh, Manatock, have you succeeded in arranging for the exchange of my poor father for the renegade?" asked Nettie, with all the eagerness natural in a loving daughter whose father was a captive in the power of the enemy.

"Ugh! Manatock make terms with Kilda," replied the Mohawk.

Then he went on briefly and related his adventures at the French camp. The Indian spoke modestly of the daring work which he had accomplished, but all understood how great had been his peril, and his achievement was duly appreciated.

Nate Badger had listened to all the conversation, and he was now exultant in the thought that he would soon be free.

The vindictive wretch mentally resolved to yet execute a terrible vengeance upon Manatock.

"Now," said Manatock, presently, "Scar-face and Manatock march Badger to stream, where meet Colonel Kilda's warriors to exchange prisoners."

"Yes, I will accompany you, Manatock, and we must be on our guard against treachery. Kilda is quite capable of any villainy, and he may set a trap for us," said Blackwood.

"Manatock thought of that. Him be on lookout. If Kilda try that Badger get killed heap quick," said the Mohawk.

Manatock and Blackwood, having first unbound Badger's limbs so that he could walk, marched the renegade out of the cave.

Meanwhile old Wyona, who now shrewdly suspected that Manatock had captured Badger at the cave of the Manito Rock, left the French camp without voicing this suspicion, and set out to make a secret scout of the cavern.

Peril for the Block House Boys and Nettie Hastings was evidently pending.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BATTLE IN THE CAVE.

Not long after the departure of Manatock and Blackwood from the cave with Nate Badger, the renegade, old Wyona the medicine woman, approached it.

As it was now broad daylight the aged Seneca squaw, who, despite her years, moved with the elastic steps of youth, came toward the mouth of the sacred cavern of the Manito Rock with great caution and stealthiness.

She soon discovered evidence of the presence of whites in the cave, and heard the voices of the fugitives.

An exultant feeling animated Wyona then, and she swiftly

glided out of the cave and went rapidly in the direction of the encampment of Nate Badger's Indian allies.

The time went by slowly to the inmates of the cave, as it always does when the occurrence of some particular event is anxiously awaited. Nearly an hour had elapsed when Bert suddenly enjoined silence, and then said in a whisper:

"I thought I heard a stealthy footstep in the cave."

In a moment the fugitives of the cave became fully convinced that there was more than one stealthily moving person approaching.

"Come," whispered Bert. "Let's creep away to the furthest depth of the cave and seek a hiding place."

As he spoke he silently led Nettie forward into the dark cavern, and after him came Val.

Presently Bert came to an obstruction. It was a mass of fallen rock which blocked the way, but it was only about three or four feet high, and the fugitives clambered over it as noiselessly as possible. Scarcely had they scaled the barrier when a ray of light flashed in the darkness, behind them, and they heard the striking of a flint. The spark had fallen upon powder sprinkled on a torch and a blaze was the result.

Then the boys and their girlish companion beheld a dozen Seneca Indians in the cave. But the whites crouched down behind the rocks, over which they had just passed, and the Senecas did not see them as yet.

Of course old Wyona had brought the savages to the cave.

In a few moments several torches belonging to the Indians were ignited from the one that was first fired, and the light thus afforded very well illuminated the cave.

The Indians now hastily advanced toward the hiding-place of the boys and Nettie. Bert and Val felt that a crisis was at hand, and that the moment for prompt and desperate action had arrived. The rocks served as a breastworks, and the two lads leveled their guns over them.

The foremost of the Indians was now very near the rocky barricade, and the keen-eyed savage at once halted and leaped backward, for he had caught a glimpse of Bert's gun, from the muzzle of which the torch light glinted.

At the same moment Bert pressed the trigger. The Indian uttered a yell, and fell head first at the foot of the rocks.

Instantly the other savages pressed forward to assault the position of the Block House Boys, and the cave rang with their blood-chilling war cries.

Then as the Senecas charged Val discharged his gun. It chanced that his bullet pierced the heart of a great war chief.

As the savage fell the remaining Senecas set up the death wail of the tribe, and halted for a moment. Then they raised the dead chief and carried him back some distance.

This delay in the attack gave the two boys an opportunity to reload their flint-lock guns.

But the Indians came on again, just as the boys were priming their weapons.

They both fired at once. But the charge was not checked.

The succeeding moment the Indians reached the rocky wall, and were attempting to scale it. Then the boys sprang up and discharged their single-barreled pistols, and clubbing their guns, wielded them furiously, seeking to beat back their red enemies.

Just then the report of three guns crashed simultaneously at the mouth of the cave.

The Indians halted in their desperate charge. They knew they were attacked in the rear, and leaving the barricade, they hastily retreated toward the entrance of the cave.

The Block House Boys sank down upon the rocks panting and well nigh exhausted with the fatigue of the desperate fight they had made.

But they believed friends were at hand, and the thought cheered them beyond measure.

As the Senecas thronged toward the mouth of the cave the three guns crashed again in a deadly volley.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE CAVE AGAIN.

After leaving the cave in which the Block House Boys and Nettie Hastings were secreted Manatock and Blackwood swiftly marched their prisoner toward the forks of the stream at no great distance, to which Colonel Kilda had agreed to send Colonel Hastings that he might be exchanged for Badger.

Kilda had kept faith with the Indian, for two Seneca braves met them with Colonel Hastings, and the exchange was soon made. Badger and the two Senecas at once hastened away in the direction of their encampment.

Colonel Hastings and his friends rapidly retreated in the opposite direction, and shaped their course in the shortest route to the cave of the Manito.

Manatock hastened to acquaint the anxious father with the most welcome intelligence of Nettie's rescue.

Manatock and his two companions were soon very near the Manito cave. Then, all at once the muffled report of fire-arms reached their hearing, and also the indistinct yells of the Senecas. An intensely anxious expression came upon the features of the Mohawk, as he said:

"Seneca dogs in cave!"

"Then our friends are in awful peril, and my daughter, Nettie, too!" exclaimed Colonel Hastings.

"Yes, and we must to the rescue," said Blackwood.

"Wait!" cried Manatock, and turning aside he ran to a hollow tree, and thrusting his arm into an opening of its trunk he drew forth first a loaded gun, and then a powder-horn and bullet-pouch. These articles the Mohawk had secreted in the hollow tree more than a month previously, after taking them from a Seneca spy whom he had shot.

Manatock gave the gun and ammunition to Colonel Hastings, and then all three advanced, and reaching the mouth of the cave, they peered into it, and by the light afforded from the torches of the Senecas they saw at once what was transpiring in the underground place.

The three guns that suddenly crashed forth a deadly volley at the mouth of the cave at the opportune moment when the redskins were about to scale the rocky barricade, behind which the Block House Boys had so heroically battled, were discharged by Manatock and his two companions.

But as they fired the second time the Mohawk's quick ear caught an alarming sound from the adjacent forest.

A moment subsequently he was sure that a considerable band of Senecas were approaching from the direction of their camp, and almost at the same time he caught a glimpse of rapidly moving forms as the coming Senecas crossed an open space.

Then the voice of Nate Badger, the renegade, was heard shouting to his Indians to urge them on.

"The whites are in the sacred cave. Forward and we shall capture them all. Wyona's band are fighting the whites now. Ha, ha! The Manito cave shall be a death-trap for them all!"

Manatock and his comrades sprang into the bushes at the mouth of the cave as Badger's voice was heard, and the Senecas who were then inside the cavern rushed out pell-mell.

"What shall we do? If we rush to the boys in the cave, before we may get out with them the renegade's reinforcements will be here, and we shall be trapped in the cave," said Blackwood.

CHAPTER XXII.

MANATOCK GOES FOR HELP.

The situation was not only a perilous one, but perplexing as well. But Manatock was thinking deeply, and the quick-witted

Indian grasped every phase of the present situation as well as those which succeeding events might be presumed to presently cause. The Indian's plans were immediately formed, and he hastened to say:

"Only one way. Manatock go for help while you go in cave. With boys you make four. Mouth of cave small. You four, if make good fight, hold out some time fore Senecas get in cave."

"Yes. You have solved the problem!" replied Blackwood, and he rushed into the cave as he spoke, closely followed by Colonel Hastings, while Manatock glided away unseen.

The Block House Boys and Nettie rushed forward and met Blackwood and the exchanged prisoner. Nettie sprang into her father's embrace, with a glad cry, and Blackwood said to the boys:

"Now to barricade the entrance. Manatock has gone for help. All depends upon our holding the cave against the Indians until he returns."

There were loose rocks at hand, and all set to work to heap them in a barricade across the mouth of the cave, but almost immediately the Indians under Badger, who had now come up, made a charge. They were met with a volley from the cave that sent them backward in a hasty retreat, and then the besieged set to work again on the barricade. Blackwood encouraged all by speaking hopefully, and they labored as only those can who feel that they are striving to save their lives.

It now began to dawn upon the mind of Badger that he was not to capture the occupants of the cave very easily. But he sought to intimidate them by shouting:

"You are caught in a trap and you may as well surrender! We will make you exhaust your supply of ammunition, and then we shall have you."

No reply was returned to the renegade and the battle was continued.

Meanwhile Manatock sped swiftly through the forest on his way to the encampment of the Americans at the site of the burnt blockhouse. He was one of the swiftest of all the speedy runners of the great Mohawk tribe, and he arrived at the American camp in much less time than one might have supposed he would have required to gain it.

The commander of the thousand men sent from Fort Edward too late to save the block house, suspected the retreat of the French and Indians, who greatly outnumbered his army, was a ruse to draw him into the wilderness, where the Indians could be used to the greatest advantage against him. Therefore he did not advance. But he was planning to meet the stratagem attempted by the enemy with a grand coup.

Burning with rage, and longing to avenge the terrible massacre of the Americans at the block house, Colonel Wilson, of the American force, at once sent a runner back to Fort Edward to bring up more troops as soon as possible. When Manatock reached the camp another thousand men had just arrived from Fort Edward in answer to Colonel Wilson's call.

Manatock sought Colonel Wilson and acquainted him with the perilous situation of Colonel Hastings and his companions in the cave. The Indian also gave the American commander valuable information regarding the present location of the French and Indians in the adjacent wilderness. Then a hundred picked scouts were placed under the leadership of Manatock, and he set out with them to save the whites at the besieged cave. At the same time an advance of the American forces was made up the lake. It was the intention of the Americans to attack the French and then retreat, and if possible draw the enemy out of the forest. Half the American force was left behind, so that the enemy would be led to underestimate their numbers. The reserves would fall upon the enemy if the ruse to draw them out of the timber succeeded.

Meantime the besieged whites in the cave were compelled

to keep up a steady firing in order to check the repeated onset of the enemy. At last the end of the heroic defense of the cave seemed about to arrive. The defenders had loaded their weapons with the last round of ammunition in their possession, and still the hoped-for assistance did not come.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE AMERICANS DRIVE BACK THE ENEMY.

Above the din of the terrible conflict at the mouth of the cave, where the devoted little band of whites were desperately fighting for their lives against overwhelming numbers of the Indians, there suddenly rang out a resounding cheer.

The noble Indian had arrived with help in the very nick of time. The hundred Americans swept down upon the renegade savages like a resistless tornado, and only Badger and two or three others escaped the white avengers.

The Block House Boys and their companions came out of the cave, and a scene of rejoicing ensued. The white scouts all knew and respected Colonel Hastings, and they rejoiced over his rescue.

As they traversed the woods toward the American army Blackwood marched beside the Block House Boys, and presently he said to them in low tones:

"Circumstances have prevented my revealing to you the great secret which I have desired to tell you ever since I escaped from the Cherokee Indians, to whom I was sold by the arch villain Volmar Kilda."

"That secret concerns our father, the will by which he was disinherited, and some fraud on the part of Kilda," said Bert.

"Yes," assented Blackwood. "It is a singular story. The fact is, in England I was a gamekeeper on the estate of your grandfather. You probably know your grandfather was killed mysteriously in the game preserves on his estate. Very well. Volmar Kilda had found out that your grandfather had made a will revoking the one by which he disinherited your father. The last will made your father the main heir. Now, Kilda murdered your grandfather. I saw him do the deed. He had previously stolen the last will, and, he thought, destroyed it. But by a lucky accident I had secured it. Kilda, in ignorance of the fact that I had the lost will, but knowing I saw him murder your grandfather, bribed me to go to America. I went, and I brought the lost will here with me. Meantime, after converting most of the estate which he wrongfully acquired through the first will into money, Kilda also came to America. Then, to extort money from him, I made known that I had the last will. He planned cunningly after that, and I was kidnapped and sold to the Cherokees. But I had secreted the last will, and Kilda did not secure that. At last I escaped, thirsting for vengeance, and resolved to undo the wrong of which I had been guilty by helping your father to obtain the fortune Kilda unjustly holds. An explosion of powder accidentally scarred my face, and the terror of a single night, when I believed that in the morning I should perish at the torture stake, turned my hair as white as snow."

"Where now is the will that makes my father the heir of the English inheritance?"

"In the house of Volmar Kilda, at his principal trading-post for barter with the Indians," replied Blackwood.

"Then it is beyond our reach," said Val.

"I have a plan. Manatock must be taken into our confidence, and we will arrange to go in disguise to Kilda's trading-post and secure the will during the arch scoundrel's absence," explained Blackwood.

Manatock was called and everything relating to the will and the project to recover it was explained to the Mohawk, who readily volunteered to accompany the boys and the "scar-face" Blackwood on their perilous mission into the enemy's country.

The party reached the American army after a long march, and went to a cabin by the lake shore near the position of the reserve troops. There Nettie and her father were quartered:

Then the other went on to take a hand in the impending battle. The Block House Boys and Blackwood led on by Manatock overtook the division of the American army that had gone forward to make a sham attack on the enemy.

A brief but sharp engagement ensued when the attack was made. The French and Indians, thinking the entire American force, whom they so greatly outnumbered, was before them, charged fearlessly.

This was, of course, just what the cunning American commander desired them to do, and he ordered a retreat. The French and Indians thought the battle was well-nigh won.

The Americans continued to fall back until the French and Indian forces were all drawn out of the woods, into the clovered fields adjacent to the destroyed block house.

There was a valley not far from the woods whose sides concealed the American reserves. Colonel Hastings was now in command of the troops hidden there.

When the French and Indians had passed the end of the valley the reserve led by Colonel Hastings charged upon their flank, uttering shouts that made the forest ring, and resounded afar over the clearings.

Then was the Americans' hour of vengeance.

The bloodthirsty Indians were slain in vast numbers, and a retreat of the French and their red allies, which was little better than a disastrous flight, at once commenced.

The Americans pursued the enemy and drove them back to Crown Point, which post was so well fortified that the Americans did not deem it advisable to lay siege to it just then.

The return march of our troops immediately began when the enemy had reached Crown Point, but the Block House Boys and Manatock went on toward Canada with Blackwood

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Without great difficulty, Manatock had secured complete Seneca war-dresses for the entire party. These he took from dead enemies after the battle.

All were not only dressed as Senecas, but they were stained and painted so as to defy detection even by a suspicious person, and they were sure of passing for what they seemed, unless they by some overt act or premature revelation placed themselves at a disadvantage.

The journey to the post, which Kilda had established in order to carry on his trade with the Indians, was reached after several days' march. It was just at nightfall when the Block House Boys and their venturesome comrades arrived in sight of the fur-traders' settlement.

From the brow of an adjacent hill, where they stood at the edge of a fringe of timber, where the darkening shadows screened them from the sight of the people of the trading-post, Blackwood pointed out one cabin larger than any other, standing close to the great store-house.

"That cabin," said he, when he knew that his hearers saw the particular dwelling which he indicated, "is the cabin always occupied by Kilda when he is here. During his absence it is closed. In that dwelling the night I was kidnapped I hid the will of which I told you under a certain stone in the hearth. Now, when all the people of the little settlement are asleep, we will advance and seek to enter Kilda's cabin, secure the hidden will, and escape."

The party remained where they were until midnight. Then the last light in the little settlement disappeared.

Proceeding stealthily, they reached Kilda's cabin. They soon convinced themselves that there was no one inside of it. Then, leaving Manatock and the boys on the watch outside of

it, Blackwood forced open a window as silently as possible and entered.

Meantime, the very day that the Block House Boys and their comrades set out for the Canadian trading-post, Kilda, accompanied by Nate Badger, the renegade, and a body-guard of a score of Seneca warriors, by a singular contretemps, also started for the same place.

A messenger, coming in great haste from the trading post, had brought Kilda the intelligence that his Indian wife, who resided there, and to whom he was much attached, was dying.

So Kilda set out for the post without any delay.

At the time when Blackwood entered the cabin of Kilda that villain and his men were rapidly approaching the settlement.

Blackwood had been inside of the house but a few moments when he leaped through the window with a package in his hand, and said to his friends triumphantly:

"I have it! I found the will just where I secreted it so long ago."

The Block House Boys were delighted, and the little party at once started to leave the settlement.

They had reached its confines when, as they were about to enter the woods, there appeared before them a file of Senecas, headed by Colonel Kilda and Badger, the renegade.

The Americans sprang aside and rushed for cover. The renegades and the Indians pursued.

Suddenly Manatock wheeled and discharged his gun at Badger, and with a terrible yell the rascal fell to rise no more.

The fall of Badger checked the pursuit, and the Americans ran swiftly southward.

They obtained an excellent start, and although the Indians soon took their trail, they finally eluded their red enemies and at last reached Fort Edward in safety.

The last will was then examined, and it was found to be precisely as Blackwood had said.

Then legal measures were adopted to make Kilda turn over the fortune of Legrand Shirley to his sons. After some litigation the last will enabled the American boys to obtain the fortune of which their deceased father had been deprived by Kilda.

The villain would probably have been thrown into prison, but he was suddenly shot and killed by an Indian whom he had wronged.

Some time later, when Bert and Val Shirley were in happy possession of the fortune they had wrested from Colonel Kilda, Bert and Nettie Hastings were married.

Blackwood and Manatock always thereafter, when not employed as scouts or hunters, made their home at Bert's beautiful home on Lake George, near the site of the burned block house.

Some time later Val married happily and settled near his brother.

THE END.

Read "THE WHITE BOY SLAVES; or, THE STUDENT EXILES OF SIBERIA," by Richard R. Montgomery, which will be the next number (550) of "Pluck and Luck."

SPECIAL NOTICE: All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 5, 7, 8, 10 to 13, 16 to 18, 20, 22, 25, 29 to 31, 34 to 36, 39, 42, 43, 48 to 50, 54, 55, 57, 60, 64, 68, 69, 75, 81, 84 to 86, 89, 91, 100, 109, 116, 119, 124 to 126, 163, 171, 179 to 181, 212, 265. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 24 UNION SQUARE, New York, and you will receive the copies you order, by return mail.

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THINGS OF INTEREST.

White Island derives its name from the clouds of white steam in which it appears to be continually enveloped. Its area is only 600 acres, and its height about 880 feet above the sea level. In form and color, it is like a reposing camel, while its interior with its gray, weather beaten, almost perpendicular cliffs, recalls the Coliseum at Rome. Overhanging the southern landing place stands a column of rock closely resembling a sentinel, which has been dedicated to the memory of Captain Cook. The water of the island is of a pale green hue, and anything dipped into it becomes of a red brick color. The fumes of sulphur are always plainly perceptible. On a fine moonlight night a wonderful sight is afforded to any one who will sit in an open boat in one of the lakes of the island. Covering an area of fifty acres is an immense caldron hissing and snorting and sending forth volumes of poisonous steam, while all chances of egress appear to be denied by the steep, silent and gloomy cliffs.

Coca is the South American invigorant. The shrub from which the coca leaves are obtained grows under favorable conditions to a height of about four meters. It is cultivated in Peru and Bolivia. At the time the crop is gathered the seeds are sown in beds, when they germinate and grow, and in two months the growing plants reach a height of about a foot. The leaves, grown in the proper sunlight and shade, are yellowish, small and thick. This is the kind of leaf that is preferred for chewing by persons using the leaf as a stimulant, fortifier and preventive of sleep and fatigue in the performance of arduous work, inasmuch as they prevent rheumatism, from which miners suffer when working in mines that contain much water. Indians who masticate the leaves of this plant can work twenty-four hours without eating or sleeping. Coca leaves are used by the natives when engaged in long and fatiguing journeys and by soldiers when subject to hardships and privations. They may be used with all kinds of food and are said to cure dyspepsia, either taken as an infusion in the shape of tea or by masticating the leaves. The life of the plant when perfect is eighty years.

While the Russian citizen is forced to be content with his foreign papers blacked out by the censor, the czar, until the commencement of the Japanese war, was supplied with news of the outside world only through the medium of a daily paper printed for him by a special department of the foreign office. This contained clippings and translations from all the European papers, and was printed upon fine paper from special type. All items which might be supposed to be disquieting to the czar were eliminated by the editors, and the freshly printed sheet contained news designed to please the one subscriber. During the war, however, the czar insisted upon also being supplied with "unblacked" copies of certain English papers, and

these were sent with no good grace by the censors, who in times past had resorted to odd devices to keep certain publications from their imperial master, counterfeits sometimes being printed. This was notably the case with the revolutionary sheet published in London, which was rabid in its strictures of the court officials. The paper and type were so cleverly counterfeited that it was some months before the scheme was detected. The blacked out matter is saved for record, and in huge scrapbooks might be found all prohibited articles.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

"Whew! Isn't this weather the worst you ever saw?" "No, sir. No weather is the worst I ever saw."

Winkers—I haven't seen you at the club for a week. You seem to have become a great home body lately. Blinkers—Yes. Wife's away.

Miss Sweetly—I think your writings resemble some works of the greatest writers. Young Scribbler (delighted)—In what manner? Miss Sweetly—You will not live to see them appreciated.

"So you claim to possess the heart of a boy? Bah!" "But, really, I feel just as young as I ever did." "Go on. The fire engines went past here five minutes ago, and you were so busy reading some of Emerson's essays that you never knew it."

"John," said the political leader's wife, "you'll have to get a new policeman assigned to this beat; Bridget doesn't like the present one." "All right," said he; "and, while I'm about it, I'll get one that likes his meat rare. I'm getting tired of overdone beef."

"Hiram, what profession do you think our John ought to follow?" "I dunno," replied Farmer Korncob; "John is rather handicapped. The only profession he thinks he is naturally adapted to is that of a capitalist, and I can't see where the money's comin' from."

"Physical culture, father, is perfectly lovely. To develop the arms I grasp this rod by one end and move it slowly from right to left." "Well!" exclaimed her father, "what won't science discover? If that rod had straw at the other end you'd be sweeping."

Wigg (relating experience with burglar)—The fellow was an amateur, all right, for when I pointed my pistol at him he stood petrified with fear. Wagg—He did? Then you're mistaken about his being an amateur. If he was petrified, it's clear that he was a hardened criminal.

In a village in New Jersey the schoolmistress saw one of the little boys crying. She called him to her and inquired the reason. "Some of the big boys made me kiss a little girl out in the schoolyard," was the reply. "Why, that is outrageous! Why did you not come right to me?" "I—I didn't know that you would let me kiss you," he said.

Two Irishmen who had not met for many years came together one day recently. After much slapping of backs and rejoicing, one said: "Long time since we met, Clancy, isn't it? Lots of things have happened since then." "'Tis, indeed. Look at myself. Shure, it's married I am," replied the other. "You don't tell me. Have you any family?" asked the first speaker. "Faith, and I have that. I've a fine, healthy boy, and the neighbors say he's the picture of me." The first speaker looked at Clancy, who was not built on the lines of a prize beauty, and said: "Ah, well, what's the har-um, so long as the child's healthy?"

His Blue Trousers

By D. W. STEVENS.

There is an old adage to the effect that a woman is at the bottom of every trouble in this world of ours.

Taking McSwyny Court as a smaller sphere existing within and encircled by a greater orbit, and we find that the adage will hold good to its application therein.

Dionysius McSwyny, after his experience recently, is no doubt fully prepared to confirm the truth of the proverb referred to, for he has been in great trouble, brought about and concocted by his wife, Anastasia, although without any malice aforethought or premeditated design on the lady's part, she being the innocent cause of the whole row.

And the second agent of the fomenting of the disturbance was a pair of trousers.

Now, a pair of trousers are not troublesome in themselves, unless ill-made or too tight for comfort, but these particular trousers have been the means of raising the deuce in the McSwynian household, and, in consequence in McSwyny Court.

It seems that Dionysius had a pair of blue trousers, which for some months past he has discarded wearing, having donned an entire suit of black cheviot, with the trousers would not match, and therefore were laid aside.

They hung on a peg in one of the McSwynian bedrooms, and were rapidly becoming useless, save from the utilitarian standpoint of the old ragman.

Anastasia McSwyny, being of an economical disposition, got tired of seeing the trousers hanging on a peg, and of no earthly use to the owner, her husband, so that, upon a certain morning of last week, when Dominick Philethus McGruder, the ragman of McSwyny Court, went by the McSwynian domicile with his ringing bells clanging over his rag cart, Anastasia went to the door and called him.

"Good-mornin', Mrs. McSwyny," said McGruder, with a smile, but never pausing for breath as he went on—"Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

"Good-mornin', Mr. McGruder," responded Anastasia. "How do you do to-day?"

"Quite well, ma'am, thank ye. How's the ould man? Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

"He's nicely, Mr. McGruder," answered Mrs. McSwyny. "I've an ould pair of trousers here I'd like to sell ye."

"All right, ma'am," responded McGruder, taking the article and examining it closely. "How's your daughters, Mary Ann and Anny? Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

"They're well, Mr. McGruder, an' how much are the trousers worth, an' is your wife in good health?" answered the queried Mrs. McSwyny cordially.

"Oh, she's all right, ma'am, an' I'm glad to hear ye're all well, but all I can give ye for the trousers is tenpence. Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

"Only tenpence!" echoed Mrs. McSwyny, in astonishment. "Is that all ye'll give me for a handsome blue trousers belongin' to a suit Dionysius paid fifty shillings for to order of little Tooley, the tailor, only six months ago; and a joine fit they were, more betoken the coat an' vesht were so tight across the waist as to burst the firsh day he wore 'em."

"Well, ma'am," went on the McGruder, soothingly, "d'ye moind, they is only good for ould rags now, though I might sell them to Solomon Isaacs, the ould clo' man. I'll make a sixpence, but not more, an' thin it may be a losing speckilation. Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

"Well, take them," responded Mrs. McSwyny. "They're no good to Dionysius any more, an' I'm sure I can't wear 'em."

"You're the first woman I ever heard acknowledge that, thin," jocosely answered the McGruder, as he threw the trousers into his cart. "There ye are, ma'am; good-day, Mrs. McSwyny, Rags-an'-bottles-to-sell! Any ould r-a-g-s?"

And the old ragman trudged along, with his cart, singing his invitation to trade, while Mrs. McSwyny went indoors, rejoicing in the possession of tenpence additional pin-money.

It flashed across her mind at the last moment that possibly Dionysius might have left some important papers in the pockets, or perhaps even money, and she hastened to the door again, intending to call McGruder back.

But he had long since disappeared from view, and Mrs. McSwyny was forced to return, comforting herself with the reflection that she was possibly mistaken in her suppositious fears.

Two days afterwards Dionysius was looking curiously about the bedroom, evidently hunting for something, when Mrs. McSwyny passed by the door leading to the kitchen.

"Anastashia," called out Dionysius, "did you see an ould blue trousers of mine hanging up here?"

"A blue trousers?" echoed Mrs. McSwyny. "Do ye mane that dirty ould thing ye've had hangin' there for a month back?"

"That dirty ould thing is jist the wan I do mane," reiterated Dionysius. "Where's it gone to, I'd like to know?"

"Where do ye s'pose it'd go to," answered Mrs. McSwyny indignantly, "like the old rag 'twas, but to the rag dealers?"

"What!" yelled Dionysius, leaping three feet from the floor in his excitement.

"Yis," answered Mrs. McSwyny, composedly enough, yet not without a certain misgiving. "I sold it two days ago to McGruder for old rags."

"Tare an' ounds!" roared Dionysius, dancing on the floor with madness. "Are ye mad, woman alive?"

"Aisy, Dionysius, aisy now," went on Mrs. McSwyny. "Don't go about like a lunatic havin' a dose of the jim-jams. I'm not mad, thin."

"Be Heavens, woman," responded Dionysius, confronting his wife angrily, "ye'll drive me mad wid yer lack of common sinse. Do ye not know that I got little Tooley the tailor to sew three bank-notes in the waisht of that flannel trousers?"

"Oh, murder! murder!" wailed Anastasia, as Dionysius rushed into the street excitedly.

Tenants in McSwyny Court must have thought him a madman, from the manner in which he hurried along, running into and over everybody.

At last he reached the ragman's, who keeps next door to Winkelmyer's shop.

"Have ye a blue flannel trousers o' mine here, McGruder?" he asked, excitedly.

"A blue flannel throusters," answered McGruder, meditatively. "I think so, Mac. I recollect buyin' them av yer wife."

"Yis, bad scrán to her for sellin' that same, an' not half worn," went on Dionysius.

"Frederick James," called McGruder to his son, "what be-kim av that blue flannel trousers I bought two or three days ago?"

"Why, dad," responded Frederick James, promptly, "don't you recollect? You sold them to Solomon Isaacs yesterday afternoon for half a crown."

Dionysius didn't wait to hear any more, but rushed madly out of the shop, and away he went at a go-as-you-please gait on the last mile, for Isaac's shop.

"Have ye a blue flannel trousers from McGruder here?" he repeated, as Isaacs bid him good-morning.

"A blue flannel trousers?" queried Solomon, as he looked about his shop. "I pay me one of dose lasht night, I think."

"Where is it?" asked McSwyny hurriedly. "I'll buy it av ye at double what ye paid McGruder for it."

"I sell him again dish mornin' for ziven and sixpence," explained Isaacs, graciously, "to dot young mon wat lifes down by der court. His name is—Rachel! Rachel!"

"Vot you vant, fader?" came a voice, evidently belonging to Rachel.

"Vat is der name of dot young mon vot puy dose plue flannel trousers dish mornin' for ziven and sixpence?" asked Solomon.

"You mean dot mon vot vore a plue shirt mit short hair, fader?" queried Rachel.

"Yesh, my tearsh," Solomon answered. "Dot young mon vot bead me down from fifteen shillings to half-prize."

"Dot young mon's name ish Rooderig Alphonso Moriarty," answered Rachel.

Dionysius thanked Solomon and Rachel Isaacs for their courtesy, and started out in search of Roderick Alphonsus Moriarty; and it is safe to say that he never had such a hard day's traveling.

Moriarty had gone to Mulvaney's livery stable.

Mulvaney told him Roderick Alphonsus had gone to a funeral with one of his (Mulvaney's) drivers.

When Dionysius got to the home of the late lamented, the mournful cortege had started for the cemetery.

Over to the cemetery followed Dionysius, only to find when he had got there that the interment had taken place, and back came the half-crazed man to Mulvaney's.

The driver was found here, but not Roderick Alphonsus, who had left him to go to the theater with Tim O'Shaugnessy and Felix Vincent O'Dwyer.

Fortunately for Dionysius he caught the boys on the way, and offered ten shillings for an immediate delivery of the troublesome trousers, besides volunteering to purchase a new pair at once.

Roderick Alphonsus consenting with pleasure, the exchange was made, and Dionysius quickly ripped open the waist lining, and found the three bank-notes untouched.

"Jimminy Christopher!" exclaimed Roderick Alphonsus, "if I'd a-known that, those trousers would be worth twenty pounds at least. What a puddin' you've got, McSwyny."

Dionysius has got back the money invested in this novel savings bank, but will hereafter fall back on the old style, a wise conclusion which we think our readers will coincide with.

Forests of Stone

"I had a queer experience once," a gentleman, who had been examining the collection of trees and woods in the old Arsenal building, Central Park, said, "and these hard woods remind me of it. I was prospecting in Arizona with a party of friends, and we had had rough luck. We had a young Irishman as cook that I had picked up in Omaha, who was worth more than any ten men I ever saw in keeping up the spirits of the crowd. The lower the provisions the more jovial he was, and I'm hanged if he didn't seem to have the blues one day when we shot a bear, and were on the edge of starvation. One day, when he had been out picking up wood for a fire, he came to me and said:

"'Beggin' yer pardon, Master Tom, but av it's the same, I'd loike to take the back track."

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"It moight be that I be afraid av gettin' so fat I couldn't walk back, but divil a bit o' that," said he, solemnly. "But did ye ever hear tell o' the sthory av Ara-bayan Noights? Scarer the toime I've heard Father Clinchy relate it in the ould counthry. It's all about a counthry where the men,

women, and childer turned to stone. I always took it to be a joke, the results av too much larnin', but divil a bit when we've struck the self-same place. Ye laugh, is it? Cast yer eye on that," and he held out a perfect limb of a tree of hard, solid rock, while in the other hand he had a large, petrified oyster.

"Why, that's petrified wood," I exclaimed.

"Yes," rejoined Pat, "and we'll all be in the same fix if we kape on. I'm for the back trail."

"It was a long time before we could make him understand the situation. But it was a curious sight. We had camped on the edge of a forest that had actually turned to stone. All about were the great stumps that at first we had taken for stones, but found, on closer examination, to be trees turned into stone. Some were flat on the ground, others broken into hundreds of pieces, while all around were bones and shells all turned to stone also. How long they had been there no one knows."

Stone forests are in many parts of the world. A number of stony trees have been recently received at the Smithsonian Institute from the West. In many cases they are hardened by the peculiar atmosphere as they stand, and in others they are buried, the parts being replaced by mineral matter. The little Colorado River in Arizona has long been a famous locality for such finds. At one place more than fifteen hundred cords of trunks and sections of logs were found by Government surveyors. Most of them were silicified. Many are seven feet or more in diameter, and from twenty to seventy feet in height. The greater part of them have probably been covered in the marl that originally was a thousand feet thick.

Some of the trees are changed to jasper, assuming numerous hues, while others resemble opal, and when broken open the core is often found lined with crystals of the most beautiful tints. Louisiana and Ohio are noted localities for fossil trees. In the former State, several years ago, in turning up the ground, an ancient forest layer was unearthed, and in succession two others below it, and scientists judge from the size of the trees that from the time of the first layer to the last 50,000 years must have elapsed. In the remains of the glacial drift in Ohio old forests are often discovered. Some have been buried beneath the water by the sinking of the land. Some of the Ohio trees are not entirely changed into stone, being yet soft, while others are found in all stages from rock to porous sponge matter.

In some parts of the island of Antigua, one of the British leeward group, there are most remarkable examples of stone forests. The trees are in many instances of great size, presenting a curious sight with living birds perched upon their leafless and stony limbs.

The fossil palms are the most remarkable of all these stony forms. They generally have a cylindrical stem, rising to a great height, crowned with a canopy of foliage that stands upon the rock in high relief.

Some wonderful stone forests have been unearthed by the workers in building stone quarries of the Isle of Portland, from which comes the famous building stone. The workmen had cut down to what they termed a dirt-bed, and suddenly came to the stony forest standing upright. There were hundreds of trees a few feet apart. The tops appeared to have been wrenched off, but many were forty feet in height. On some of the limbs were the delicate stems, and here and there leaves and twigs. In Van Diemen's Land similar forests are known, the great trunks being calcified and partly silicified, while others are changed into chalcedony. They were found in most cases erect, with the branches and limbs scattered about their roots. So natural were many of these that a newly arrived laborer sent out to collect wood brought in a load, complaining of its heaviness. They are used, however, being burned for lime.

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